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HK MAGAZINE NO. 875 FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2011 www.hk-magazine.com



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Guessing the Budget

With Financial Secretary John Tsang promising his big budget speech next week, rumors have been circulating among the media scrum that he may be sitting on upwards of \$70 billion in surplus. Which means it's time for our favorite game—guessing the budget! So without further ado, we present to you our best guesses for the astronomical budget surplus...

Surplus Killers

In response to the mainland's new "Carrier Killer" missiles that are designed to counterbalance the US Navy, we're expecting Mr. Tsang to announce new "Surplus Killer" missiles that can wipe out a sizable chunk of our city's mind-boggling budget surplus in one massive infrastructure project. This year, we're pretty sure he's aiming one at a stretch of mud between Shenzhen Airport and Hong Kong Airport.

Education

Education is very important, we can all agree. And with the population of schoolchildren declining, we will have to face the fact that we will need to lay off more staff and close schools and be forced to corral over 40 students into a single classroom where an overworked teacher barks at them with a megaphone. That sucks. So let's move on...

Tax Refund!

We really raked it in last year. So let's give something back to everyone—even the super rich will get a tax credit for the following year that will amount to probably less than HK\$10,000. Which is the equivalent of a meal out in LKF for three clients, a couple of bottles of wine and a night on the town. Pretty snazzy.

Something for the Poor

Besides the small fraction of fabulously rich in Hong Kong whom we all know and love, there are also lots of poor people in town, too. Some estimates even put the size of this population at "huge." So here's a small travel stipend for taking the MTR, but only for families.

Can I Get a Creative Hub Up in Here?!

Let's branch out this year—how about a creative hub on the Shenzhen border? An arts hub in—what the hell—Kwun Tong! This should build us a bridge to the future. And if that doesn't work, we can physically build another bridge somewhere.

Bank It

So by now, we can see that there are plenty of whimsical or far-flung social programs we could be spending money on, such as safety nets for the poor and elderly and more subsidies for families who live five-strong in a 400-square-foot space. Indeed, we could let our imaginations run wild all day, conjuring up all kinds of surplus-soaking fancies, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. For tonight—we hoard!

HK this week:

Black Swan

Penny Zhou has a lot to say about this Oscar heavyweight. **Page 36.**

The Other SoHo

We go snoop around Sai Wan Ho's little dining strip that could. **Page 20.**

Last Suppers

We ask a panel of notable Hongkongers to pick their final meals in town. **Page 10.**



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LETTERS

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Chained to a Chain

Dear HK,

Every morning before going to work, I enjoy sipping my cup of coffee at a neighborhood cha chaan teng. During the Chinese New Year period, with all of the cha chaan tengs closed, I knew I had no other choices but to turn to the fast food chain Mac's to get my caffeine fix. Being environmentally conscious, I remembered to bring my own mug.

At the counter, I ordered a ground coffee and immediately took out my mug, asking to have it filled. A minute later, one of the attendants came over with a paper cup in his hand. I was stunned as I watched him empty the contents of the cup into my mug—and discard the paper cup afterwards.

I was a bit confused and for a moment wondered if I had made myself clear. After all, they did comply with my request. According to the staff, this was the "proper" way things were done.

Question: what is the point of bringing my own mug? I felt angry and helpless. Perhaps the big chain would want to have control of the delivery of its products, but surely there are other more considerate ways to do it than to keep hurting the environment?

While the environment may never have been a priority for fast food chains, the response of the staff shows that they make no real effort whatsoever to please those who want to help the environment.

It's high time we all ditched the chains.

Susanna Cheng

Happy Valley

It Is Not Cold

Dear HK,

So I just came back from Beijing, where its freezing cold and you HAVE to wear long johns because the wind cuts through your jeans like daggers. I was walking around Central today, and I swear that by judging from what people wore, I thought I was back in Beijing: down jackets, super thick scarves and wool/cashmere trench coats. I've been told it was "freezing" in Hong Kong, but don't people check the weather forecast before going out? It was 16 degrees Celsius today, and I was wearing a light spring jacket and a long top—and I was sweating!

I just have it in mind that people here are really afraid of anything bad happening. They go see the doctor for the slightest thing. Whenever there's the slightest drizzle of rain, they all whip out their umbrellas like it's the end of the world and the sky is falling down.

AND, last but not least, Hong Kong people don't "travel." They only "vacation." They go on these packaged tours with tour guides because they're afraid of getting mugged or getting lost in a strange place. That's why they can never tell you about any "local" customs or have any stories to tell, except that they went to all the touristy areas and how their five-star hotel meal was good.

I hear it's going to get really cold by Friday, so I'm half expecting to see fur jackets, winter toques, gloves and boots!

Ivan Cheung

Mong Kok

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Last Week
In Reality

Sat 5

Tourist Trap Mainland visitors join a tour led by a Hongkonger guide, who takes them to a jewelry shop. The visitors do not buy anything, and the guide becomes exasperated. She calls them dogs and says that they are poor, leading to a brawl between a couple, the tour guide and her colleague. The police arrest all four of them. Right after the incident, the couple goes public, showing reporters their injuries. Afterward, local media reports that the couple is slated to receive \$120,000 compensation for their injuries.

Sun 6

Rabbit Rights Media Evangelism—a Christian media group—organizes a Chinese New Year event at Noah’s Ark, the amusement park and education center on Park Island. If tourists pay \$20, they can take a picture with 100 rabbits. After the event ends, the rabbits will be available for adoption. Animal activists blast the event, arguing that the activity will prompt largescale abandonment of the animals.

Mon 7

Marital Spat A Cathay Pacific flight attendant is being driven by husband to the airport. On the way, the couple gets into an argument. The man stops his car on the highway and kicks his wife out of the car before driving away. Abandoned, the woman begins to cry. Another driver stops for her and calls the police. After an hour, the police contact the husband, who could face prosecution for stopping his car on a highway.

Tue 8

Mall Brawl A couple is visiting a shopping mall in Lam Tin. Suddenly, the boyfriend urinates in the lobby. A passing couple sneers at the man, leading to a fight between both couples. All of them are later arrested for fighting in public.

Wed 9

Tumbler Tot In Kwai Chung, a 16-month-old boy sneaks into the kitchen while his mother is distracted. He stands on a basket of clothes next to the washing machine, opens the cover and starts the machine before tripping and falling in. The mother soon realizes her son has disappeared, then finds him inside the machine. The toddler is in serious condition.

Thu 10

Train Fall A 26-year-old man is waiting for a train to arrive at the Kwai Hing MTR station. Suddenly, he passes out onto the tracks. Other passengers try to pull him back to the platform as the train approaches. Fortunately, the train brakes and nobody is injured. The MTR has already begun installing screen doors at that station, and the work is expected to be completed at the end of this year.

Fri 11

Naked Chef A cook is working in a restaurant in Sai Wan when he suddenly walks out to the street and tears off all his clothes. After a while, he sees a woman in her 50s walking with her grandson. He grabs her handbag, and she runs inside a cha chaan teng to escape. He keeps wandering on the street, and then sees another old lady. He pushes her to the ground. Three passers-by try to stop him and call the police. When the naked man is arrested, he yells, “I am so itchy, and I want to have sex!”

Quote of the Week

“The court’s ruling shows there is fairness and justice in society.”

The late Nina Wang’s brother, Dr. Kung Yan-sum, speaks after the Court of Appeal roundly rejected feng shui master Tony Chan Chun-cheun’s appeal that he is the rightful heir to the deceased billionaire’s fortune.

The Bookie



Baby Penguin Financial Secretary John Tsang

In its corner In his corner

Fuzzy	Fuzzy
Just born in Ocean Park	Just about to give Budget Speech
Hoards fat to combat cold	Hoards budget surplus for some reason
Look at me, an adorable baby penguin!	Hey, look at that adorable baby penguin!

The odds: 2-1 Baby penguin

The verdict: Tsang is expected to deliver another frigid budget in terms of giving back to the community, but at least the baby penguin is biologically adapted for it.

Numbness

Fast Facts

Our favorite new responses to complaints about the cold...

“Yeah, well, where I come from—in Canada—we complain more than you”

Leaning in close to complainer’s ear and then breathing hot breaths into it.

“You know those hand-warmer things you get in Stanley Market? Yup, I’ve sewn them into underwear.”

“Man, I’m going to really stick it to nature this summer with the air con.”

Preemptively put on Gore-Tex then yell “GORE-TEX!!!” at everyone on the street.

The Social Calendar

Friday, Feb 18: Pop Up Shop. The Space, 201 Hollywood St., Sheung Wan, 2361-1210.

Making Merry. Galerie Ora-Ora, G/F, 7 Shin Hing St., Central, 2851-1171.

Saturday, Feb 19: Cosmo Vitelli/Chinese New Year Party. 10:30pm. Top Deck, Jumbo Kingdom, Shum Wan Pier Drive, Wong Chuk Hang, Aberdeen, 2552-3331. \$200 in advance, \$250 at the door.

Pipe Organ Concert. 5pm. Concert Hall, Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui. Call 2734-2009 for free, first-come-first-serve tickets.

Sunday, Feb 20: The Year of the Rabbit. SCAD Gallery, 2/F, 30-32 Wyndham St., Central, 2253-8200.

Wednesday, Feb 23: Cash Money. 11pm onward. Dragon-i, UG/F, The Centrium, 60 Wyndham St., Central, 2899-0059. \$300 at the door.

Thursday, Feb 24: Mark Farina. 10pm. Hush, G/F, 2 Glenealy Rd., Central, 2537-2281. Free for Hush members. \$100 in advance or \$150 at the door, includes one standard drink.



Street Talk Post-80s farmer **Becky Au** gave up a career in the city to go back to her roots and run a farm in her native village of Ma Shi Po in Fanling. She talks to Emily Wu about her life running the Ma Po Po Community Farm.

HK Magazine: Why did you decide to leave your job in the city and return to the farm?

Becky Au: As a child, I always thought of staying here to work, but I often heard people say that our farmland could be acquired by a developer at any time, so it wouldn’t be a stable job at all. After graduating from university, I secured a job at a research company, but all I did was check emails all day long. It was really boring! I wondered why going to work had to be like that? I tried to work in the city for almost three years, but I hated it.

HK: You are a rare case among the Post-80s generation, how did you become a farmer?

BA: I was born and raised in Ma Shi Po. I love this place very much. I realized that I want a job that is close to nature and to my home. Some of my friends suggested that I should build a farm here. So why not? Myself and two other post-80s farmers knew nothing about farming, so we started picking up the techniques bit by bit.

HK: Do you think it was too much of a sacrifice to quit a stable job?

BA: I don’t think so. We earn money so as to sustain our life. And what’s life? It’s “clothing, food, housing, transportation,” and I have everything I need here on the farm— we grow our own food, so we don’t have to buy any. It’s not necessary for me to get paid in order to live.

HK: How would you describe your childhood on the farm?

BA: I had a very happy and sweet childhood. I always think that children living in high-rise residential buildings are pitiful, because they are trapped inside their house by the four walls. We had a lot of stuff to play with—we can run around, ride a bike, catch fish. We have everything here. People in this village are very nice to each other and we have a very good relationship.

HK: You are bringing in new elements to the farm, such as workshops, an organic vegetable market and even concerts. What do you want to achieve through all these?

BA: People think of land like it’s a product—they think that it’s for property only and one has to make a big fortune out of it. But we think that there are many alternatives. We farmers want people to have a closer relationship with the land and tell people more about where food comes from. I want more people to visit and experience nature for themselves.

HK: What do you think the government can do to help you and the other farmers here?

BA: The government is not giving us any help; rather they want to eliminate us, as we are technically the non-indigenous inhabitants. The government sees our farm as their development area. They dare not do anything to the indigenous inhabitants, as they have to compensate them, so they take advantage of us instead. Ma Shi Po is one of the ten major infrastructure projects, and the government has begun to turn this land into the North East New Territories New Development Area. They never consulted us, but they have shown undue favor to the developers.

HK: Do you think you are different from the rest of the Post-80s generation?

BA: I think I am luckier than them, as I have my farm and I can eat the best and freshest food.

HK: Are you going to spend the rest of your life in Ma Shi Po?

BA: My grandparents and my parents were full-time farmers. I want to grow old here, like they have done.

To learn more about Becky’s farm, go to mapopo.wordpress.com (website in Chinese only).

The Cheat Sheet

Your five-minute guide to Hong Kong news.

Road Dispute Resolved for Tsoi Yuen Villagers

A road dispute—which had been the biggest obstacle as Tsoi Yuen Village residents attempt to rebuild their homes in another village after theirs were earmarked for destruction to make way for the \$66.9 billion Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link—has been resolved. A mystery benefactor has bought the rights to access a privately owned road, the only way villagers can get to their new homes, and he will allow villagers to use it for free. The government had promised to help the displaced residents build a new Tsoi Yuen village, and families bought an 188,000-square-foot site in Pat Heung for more than \$18 million. However, reconstruction fell into a deadlock because indigenous villagers in Pat Heung forbade them to use a 300-meter road leading to the site unless they paid up. Pat Heung demanded \$200,000 last August to use the road, then \$500,000 in November. Finally, in December, it asked for \$5 million. After mediation by Heung Yee Kuk Chairman Lau Wong-fat, an anonymous donor offered to buy the access rights. Lau refused to reveal his identity and the sum of compensation involved.

Transport Allowances for the Poor Under Fire

The government announced a revised travel allowance scheme, lowering the income and asset limits for applicants and making it easier for people to apply for extra funding to pay for their daily commute. Officials expect that 47,599 more workers will benefit. For a two-person family to qualify for a transport allowance, their combined income should not exceed \$10,000, while a three-person household should not earn more than \$13,000. Co-habiting couples will be subject to the same conditions as a two-person family. Despite the lower caps, the program has come under attack. Secretary for Labor and Welfare Matthew Cheung has firmly rejected demands from labor activists to allow a “dual track” mechanism, which allows individuals to apply. Instead, the government insisted on using families as the unit for judging eligibility. A community organizer at the Society for Community Organization (SoCO), Ng Wai-tung, says that the income of most couples—if both members work full-time and receive minimum wage—would easily exceed the \$13,000 limit. Lawmaker Lee Cheuk Yan also criticized the scheme, arguing that it penalizes families with more working members.

HOT

Oscar Fever
With Oscars just around the corner, local HK distributors will begin their yearly tradition of shoe-horning in as many quality films as they can into a tiny two-week window over the next month—yay.

Will Battles

With the Ho drama quieting down over CNY and Tony Chan getting defeated yet again in court, it's swiftly becoming less and less fun to watch the greedy sideshows of Hong Kong. What's happened to us?

Cold

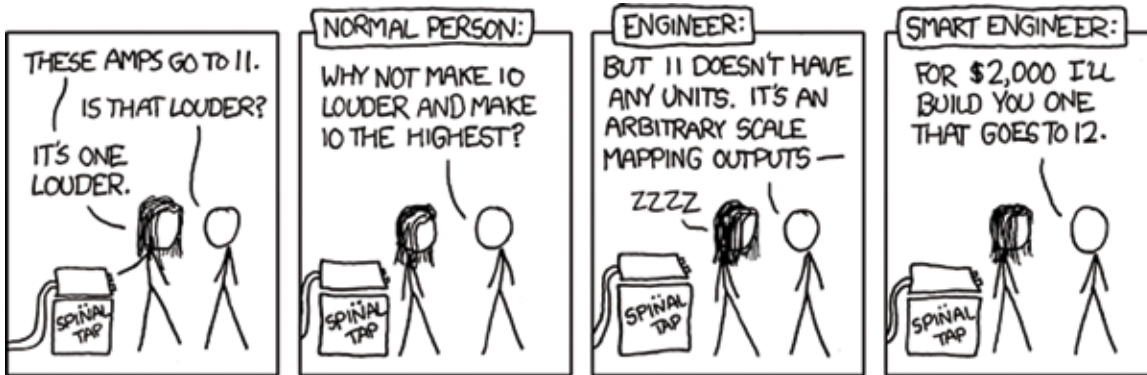
You know what's a good idea to do in the cold? COLD PARTY! See you in LKF tonight—underwear only please.

Flowers

Alright now that V-day is over and the Alpha OL in your office has been crowned, can the city's couriers please get back to dropping off the much more important press packs on new watch launches and buffet promotions?

NOT

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POLITICALLY INCORRECT with Chip Tsao

Why Tahrir is No Tiananmen

If the Egyptians could do it, why can't the Chinese? While Tahrir Square was the frenzied center of their uprising, the Egyptians made no mistake from day one in their consistent calling for the unconditional resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. The goal was both precise and persistent.

In Tiananmen Square, the slogans of Chinese students in 1989 were limited to milder and more vague moral demands, such as "anti-corruption." Nobody dared to utter the blasphemy of "down with Deng Xiaoping," although he was rumored to have an emergency airplane ready for an exit. The Chinese simply think that the emperor is a good guy, but has merely made some "mistakes." When three protestors from Hunan threw eggs at the portrait of Chairman Mao, they were treated as criminals, seized by students and handed over to the public security bureau officers immediately. The three got long prison sentences of up to 18 years thanks to the vigilance of the students-cum-Red-Guards. With an "uprising" of this kind, Beijing had little to worry about.

The Egyptians were willing to pay a price for their change—a few dozen protesters died in violent scuffles with President Mubarak's police. The Chinese are obsessed with the "principle" of Gandhi-style non-violence, while forgetting they are no Indians and their rival is not as benevolently vegetarian as the British. Were there any informers infiltrated into the gatherings at Tahrir Square? Perhaps, but at that moment the Egyptians would never allow Mubarak's regime to employ a divide-and-rule tactic. They united and took part passionately in the uprising rather than stepping aside and waiting to lay their bet on the winner's side.

In the jungle called China, there is simply a greater variety of political animals. For example, a species of flunkies and eunuchs are ready and willing to help consolidate the power of a master who's being challenged by offering to turn informers or propagandists for the regime. If an uprising succeeds, flunkies and eunuchs tend to keep their jobs because the winner turns into a new emperor very soon, and will need the same service. It sounds a bit like the role of civil servants in normal countries like Britain, the US and Japan, but it's not quite the same. The Chinese equivalent is a more psychologically sophisticated, but vicious one.

And finally, do the Chinese really want freedom that much or are they fearful of being free, as the Frankfurt-born psychologist Erich Fromm once famously put it? True, an authoritarian structure removes choices and freedom, but for an unimaginative and mentally lazy people, it also removes anxiety. The Chinese love to conform to group norms without bothering to understand what those norms mean—take the recent frenzies for golf or French red wines, for example. Preferring to survive under an emperor is another timeless norm that Western liberals find hard to comprehend. So the Swiss bankers may be busy in the coming weeks freezing and handing over Mubarak's assets, but some others will remain untouched for a very long time.

Chip Tsao is a best-selling author and columnist. A former reporter for the BBC, his columns have also appeared in Apple Daily, Next Magazine and CUP Magazine, among others.



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Street Fight

Hong Kong's roads are not pedestrian-friendly. So why does the government only care when people get hurt? By Emily Wu

Vehicles and pedestrians compete for street space all the time, their conflict of interest an everyday problem in this busy city. The Transport Department identifies 71 traffic hotspots, intersections where there are six or more pedestrian injury accidents or nine or more injury accidents in a one-year span, and/or two or more fatal traffic accidents in the last five years—and most of them are in West Kowloon.

What's more, Hong Kong Police Force figures show that the number of traffic accidents in 2010 totaled 14,727, causing 113 deaths and leaving 1,961 people seriously injured. The largest number of accidents happened the area around Yau Ma Tei, Tsim Sha Tsui, Jordan and Mong Kok.

It's a tricky situation, given that locals and tourists alike often wait what seems like ages for the light to turn green, choosing instead to risk their safety and dash across on a red when they see an opening in the interminable line of cars. But the government seems unwilling to implement measures, such as countdown clocks and formal crosswalks, that would alleviate the problem.

District councilors say they receive complaints from their constituents about not having enough pedestrian crossings or traffic lights, so they warily monitor the traffic conditions in their jurisdictions.

"The intersection of Nathan Road and Argyle Street and [nearby] Mong Kok Road—these are the traffic black spots where accidents always happen," says Hau Wing-cheong, chairman of the Yau Tsim Mong District Council's Traffic and Transport Committee. "I can see many pedestrians crossing the road when the red light is on, and it's really dangerous."

Mong Kok is a prime example of the problem. Widely considered one of the most densely populated, crowded spots in the world, endless shops, restaurants and entertainment options keep the area chock-full of people. It's a must-see on the tourist trail—and, Hau adds, people unfamiliar with the city are more likely not to follow rules. He often sees impatient mainlanders waiting for a green light scurry into the road, causing bus drivers to slam on the brakes, jolting passengers.

Locals acknowledge the problem, too. Ms. Cheung and Mr. Tse, who visit Mong Kok at least twice a week, say that the green lights stay on just eight or 10 seconds before flipping back to red, making it impossible for the barrage of pedestrians to cross the road. Jason, who works in a nearby boutique,

has also observed scary street scenes: "Even adults who are holding babies or who have elderly people at their side are trying to run across the road. I remember once when a taxi driver even got out of his car and scolded an old lady of around 70 years old for not watching out. Accidents are prone to happen at any time here."

The district councils, in fact, attempted to crack down on traffic problems some years ago. In 2003, the Transport Department installed countdown devices (which show how many seconds are left until the light flips to red) on pedestrian traffic lights in 95 spots across the territory on a trial basis; yet, in mid-2007, they were all dismantled.

A spokesperson from the Transport Department explains that the test run revealed that countdown clocks actually encouraged pedestrians to prematurely run across the street in an attempt to beat the timer as it ticked closer zero, thus putting them even more at risk. Given those findings, the department doesn't support countdown devices on traffic lights.

Hau says he has suggested countdown clocks for vehicular traffic lights, but those were also vetoed by government officials, who said they could result in drivers dangerously rushing to beat the light.

Given the measures embraced by other cities, Hau remains puzzled. "It has been reported that Hong Kong's neighbors, such as the mainland and Taiwan, have already installed countdown devices for both vehicular and pedestrian traffic lights," he says. "I can't see why it's not feasible to have that in Hong Kong."

Even a move like adding more traffic lights is a double-edged sword. A balance must be reached, Hau says, because it could benefit pedestrians by creating safe street space but also increase vehicular congestion.

The government says it pays particularly close attention to the 71 traffic hotspots it tracks, carrying out studies on these locations, which see more traffic accidents, and analyzing common characteristics of the factors that contribute to them so as to make appropriate and necessary improvements. But some say the government is biased against pedestrians.

"The government tends to favor the drivers, and they prefer keeping a smooth traffic flow rather than pedestrian flow," says Nelson Wong Kin-shing, councilor from the Central and Western District Council. Until pedestrians or vehicle passengers get hurt, Wong says, officials don't see the urgency to fix problems.

Wong recalls a time he visited Water Street, near Queen's Road in Sai Ying Pun, for an inspection with the Transport Department officers. He had suggested adding a pedestrian crossing there after residents advocated for it, and while they were visiting they saw an old lady fall when she tried to dodge a speeding car. It was only then that a crosswalk was installed—and in just one year, not the four or five years it usually takes.

One more danger zone: the area around Lan Kwai Fong, which attracts some tens of thousands of people every day. In rush hours, many get held up at the street by Yung Kee, the Crocs store and California Fitness, where Wellington Street, D'Aguilar Street and Wyndham Street all come together.

The Transport Department says it has studied the traffic and pedestrian flow patterns there, and as a result adjusted the footpath on Wellington Street approach to the junction in 2009. This arrangement helps slow down vehicle traffic from Wyndham Street and minimizes the crossing distance for pedestrians. The department also plans to install some railings near the Yung Kee building to keep pedestrians on the sidewalk, clearing the roadway.

Though it's not a recognized hotspot, the intersection of Bonham Strand and Morrison Street in Sheung Wan is another place where the traffic never stops, especially before the workday starts and during lunch hour. Pedestrians stand at the roadside, waiting for minutes before they can cross the short road, which lacks a proper crosswalk or a light. But the Transport Department says it has to assess road type and condition, traffic flow, pedestrian flow, vehicular speed, traffic accident record, effects on road users (like road safety or time delay)—all before they can decide whether to install a crosswalk or a light. When it comes to the Sheung Wan junction, though, the department says it would frequently hold up traffic, so it doesn't recommend it.

But if it paid more attention to the needs of those on foot, maybe it would. ■

"The government tends to favor the drivers."

Last SUPPERS



Not to get too depressing or anything, but if for some reason you had to leave Hong Kong tomorrow and you couldn't ever, ever come back, then here's one question to ask yourself—what would be the last thing you would eat?

We put this question to some of our favorite Hong Kong personalities, and asked a few of them to fabricate exit circumstances. They gave us a range of answers, from murder and death row to a walk down memory lane. Read on...

YALUN TU Columnist

My story goes like this: I shot a man in Armadillo, Texas and the law just found me. Or I was hungry. Either way, my last supper will be on a levitating house 3,000 meters above the Peak. I've been there five times before, but on the fourth, I had some bad shellfish and had to rappel down. Most people like the outdoors, by the beach, but I would feel like something more formal.

The place (not me) will be well-dressed, impossibly beautiful inside, but warm and with a soul, not cold and hotel-y like most Hong Kong restaurants. With a little jazz or maybe some JS Bach in the background—but almost imperceptible. I'd be wearing a dashiki or a tuxedo. My friends would be dining with me. Because they're my friends.

My dinner would be a smorgasbord of things I love in Hong Kong, and I'd make sure that the masseuse-chef will plate it perfectly and figure out how to mix and match items so that they pair well and the dinner tells a story, as all good dinners should. I don't care who prepares them as long as she's a supermodel who also loves giving massages and loves me for me and not the man she wants me to be.

Good red wine, traditional cocktails to begin with (excluding gin gimlets—they're terrible), and molecular gastronomy cocktails to end with. I would be having chili dumplings from Mama Chau's **Sichuan Kitchen**, La Mian from **Yu Chuan**, **Magnolia's** jumbalaya and pork ribs (just one so I guess pork rib), something decadent from **One-ThirtyOne** and **Lung King Heen**, roasted pork xiao long bao from **Crystal Jade** (which is actually better than Din Tai Fung, surprisingly), my helper's chicken curry, soft velvety tofu from somewhere, something cooked by Amy Ma because I always wanted to try her food, the **Da Domenico** pasta special, the flatbread from **Gold** and steak from the **Steakhouse**.

Obviously this mishmash of western and Asian food doesn't mix well or lend itself to fusion. Also, I don't want one of those crappy buffets that you get in hotels where everything is almost good but after sampling it all you're full, so I want this served plated, in courses, by quiet unobtrusive waiters except for one who's fun and spunky.

JOHANNES PONG Columnist, polyglot and bon vivant

I'm about to embark on the ultimate adventure of Death. I don't see the possibility of a celebratory "BYE! Leaving-Hong Kong-for-good" dinner party—I mean, I'll be flying back and forth if I had a choice, so let's be morbid and say I'm dying. That's more in tune with reality because it's a guarantee that EVERYONE WILL DIE.

Hmmm...I don't know where the supper should be. Maybe our old kitchen at the vicarage in **Yau Yat Chuen**. I grew up baking pizza and cookies with my mother there. It's very spacious; there's an oven, and a massive glass table for dining. Or maybe it's not so huge now, since I was a wee lad back then. I'd be wearing white. I'd play bossa nova and kirtans only for the beginning of the dinner.

I would have like a cornucopia of dishes, Asian-style. And strictly vegetarian. I'd have a tangy, gazpacho-like jaengban makkusu (Korean chilled noodles on a giant tray) from **Go Koong** in Tsim Sha Tsui East. Other than that, I'll probably make everything on my own... maybe a light daal or curry, a Cantonese soup with chayote, fig and almonds (although that description sounds kind of Mediterranean or Latin American!). Mashed potatoes, roasted beets, homemade kimchi, some noodle dish. No alcohol; maybe a nice clean Longjin to start, and a smooth Oolong to finish. No dessert.

I'll be dining ALONE. I want to contemplate moving on. I've done enough socializing in my life. Plus I don't want to babysit my crying friends and family, who are all going to miss me. So, yeah, just keeping it simple for my last supper. (Now my last PARTY though—prior to my last supper—will probably involve lots of alcohol, all my close friends and party treats).





GREGORY LOK

Producer of online show Wine vs. Food

Sad dinners simply suck, therefore my last supper in Hong Kong would be a celebratory one with the sole mission of making it a happy and unforgettable experience. Like most expats, 80 percent of us eventually leave this city that we love for one reason or another—either we're sent back to company headquarters, settling down, taking a step forward in another life adventure or we simply want to celebrate a supper with all our friends and we decide the only (shameless) way to get all of them to come is to pretend that we're leaving for good. Sad, but effective.

For a memorable evening I'd get all my friends to take on the stuffed Vindaloo Chili Challenge at **Koh-i-Noor's** in TST. The restaurant is special to my heart as we partnered with the restaurant to film the stuffed Vindaloo Chili Challenge, where we had the losing wine merchant of our show eat this as well as drink the slosh bucket of leftover wine from our audience.

For starters, I would be having vegetarian kebabs paired with a Henry Estate Oregon Gewurztraminer from Golden Gate Wines because the dryness compliments well with the natural herbs and flavors of the veggies. For the main course, I'd have a Jahangiri Raan leg of lamb paired with 8th Estate Winery's 2010 Grenache because the spices of the wine really enhance the flavors of the lamb. For dessert, I would have a mango lassi with a splash of Grey Goose vodka. Chef Singh from the kitchen of Koh-i-Noor's will be preparing all this for me.



LAURA LI

Co-founder of fashion online store Gizzy & Nacho

I would definitely want a dinner celebrating my life and loved ones. The meal would be on the patio area facing the water at the Hong Kong Country Club. It has a gorgeous view of the ocean, a chilled-out atmosphere and was one of my favorite places to hang out while growing up. I'm sure there are many other places like this in the world—open air, facing the ocean—but this is the only one I can think of in Hong Kong that would be chill enough for this final meal.

There would be an awesome live band playing, someone like Soulive who can jam for hours, then my music guru friends would take over and DJ, playing only my favorite music (good jazzy hip-hop, indie rock, old classics remixed in some new funky way). There would be beautiful lanterns and candles all around, lighting up the area, and huge pillows and cushions on comfy/contemporary outdoor furniture.

I would have a sample of my favorite dishes from across my favorite cuisines. I'd start with some sort of ceviche raw fish sashimi with some kind of citrus sauce—chef Makoto Ono of **Liberty Private Works** makes it so well. Then I would have a pastilla (Moroccan pigeon pie)—a fave of mine that I have at **La Kasbah** on Arbuthnot Road everytime I go. Then onto a parpadelle with unlimited shavings of white truffle. Then for fish I would like **Tetsuya's** signature trout dish—divine. For meat, I'm torn between a Shanghainese-style braised pork belly and a Portuguese-style roasted suckling pig with extra crispy skin. For dessert, I would like to have a pavlova with the freshest of fruits on top, a molten chocolate cake, some **Sift s'mores** and red velvet cupcakes, and any dessert by Claire Winstanley of **Liberty Kitchen & Bar**!



SAMANTA PONG

Founder of Word Of Mouth (WOM) guide

Every meal should be celebratory, if possible! The meal would take place at my grandmother's home in the Mid-Levels with my extended family. I've been to my grandma's once every week since I was born. We are a big close-knit family.

My cousin always opens a few bottles of wine so I would leave it up to him for the drinks. But if I could choose, I would want a bottle of white burgundy to start. Instead of having a home-cooked meal, I would order from my favorite places, such as suckling pig from **Fook Lam Moon**; soup with chicken feet, duck feet, conch and pork from **Chariot Club**; pan-fried prawns with shallots on a bed of pan-fried crispy rice vermicelli and roast goose and braised beef brisket in clear soup from **Yung Kee**; and deep-fried yellow fish served with balsamic vinegar and plain congee from The Chairman.



LONG HAIR LEUNG KWOK-HUNG

League of Social Democrats leader, rogue politician

My “last supper story” takes place on death row, where I’m waiting for my execution by firing squad. I would be allowed to dine by myself, eating at my own home in Kai Yip Estate, where my kitchen has been converted to a storage room and therefore cooking is not possible. I don’t care what I eat, as long as there’s soup, and I get to smoke a cigarette at the end of it. I would be drinking Maotai with my meal, and L’Internationale would be playing in the background. I’ll have something casual on [i.e. my Che Guevara shirt]. I’ve always been a casual kind of guy. And no, I won’t cut my hair.



JASPER DONAT

Co-owner of marketing company Branded

I have no immediate plan to leave our shores, but the pollution is getting worse than ever and it’s depressing that Hong Kong’s children have to breathe this rubbish every day. If it gets worse, who knows? There are other countries in Asia that seem to have it under control. But if I were to (have to) have a last meal in Hong Kong, I would recreate a magical moment in time with a junk trip down the Nostalgia River and my first visit to the **Frog & Toad** next to Tai Long Wan beach in South Lantau. This was a favorite for summer junks, where Tequila Joe (the owner) openly welcomed you with his beer gun and margaritas by the bucket. The long trestle tables were haphazardly arranged outside on the terrace, and if Joe thought you were getting a bit mucky, he would hose you down with cold water, which is a very useful service rarely offered by some of Hong Kong’s more celebrated five-star establishments.

The dress code would be a “junk formal” threesome of shorts, t-shirt and maybe a hat (to protect you from flying tequila), although you always somehow manage to lose one piece on the way home. The food would be basic Chinese and BBQ staples but who on earth could ever remember what was served at Frog & Toad? When you were 25 and with a bunch of friends who would soon become family for life, it really didn’t matter. Paddy, Dan, Em and Giles and Pukey Dave... the list goes on. After lunch we would retire to the bar where we would ultimately end up serving cocktails of our own making, so long as it includes tequila. We would then head back to the Aberdeen Marina with the sun setting behind us. We would be crispy from an afternoon on the terrace, with a wonderful day to chalk up on the memory board. If we could remember anything.

Alas, the Frog & Toad was closed by the Hygiene Department some years ago as they were probably the only people to ever turn up sober. They found a couple of “irregularities” in the kitchen and that was it. I mean, who really cared if the food was actually cooked or if you caught myxomatosis at the Mud Olympics? It was all about being there. But life moves on and a re-creation of the Frog & Toad would now require a kids’ play area, free wireless and clean toilets all served with a small newfound dose of responsibility.

Tequila with a tequila chaser anyone?



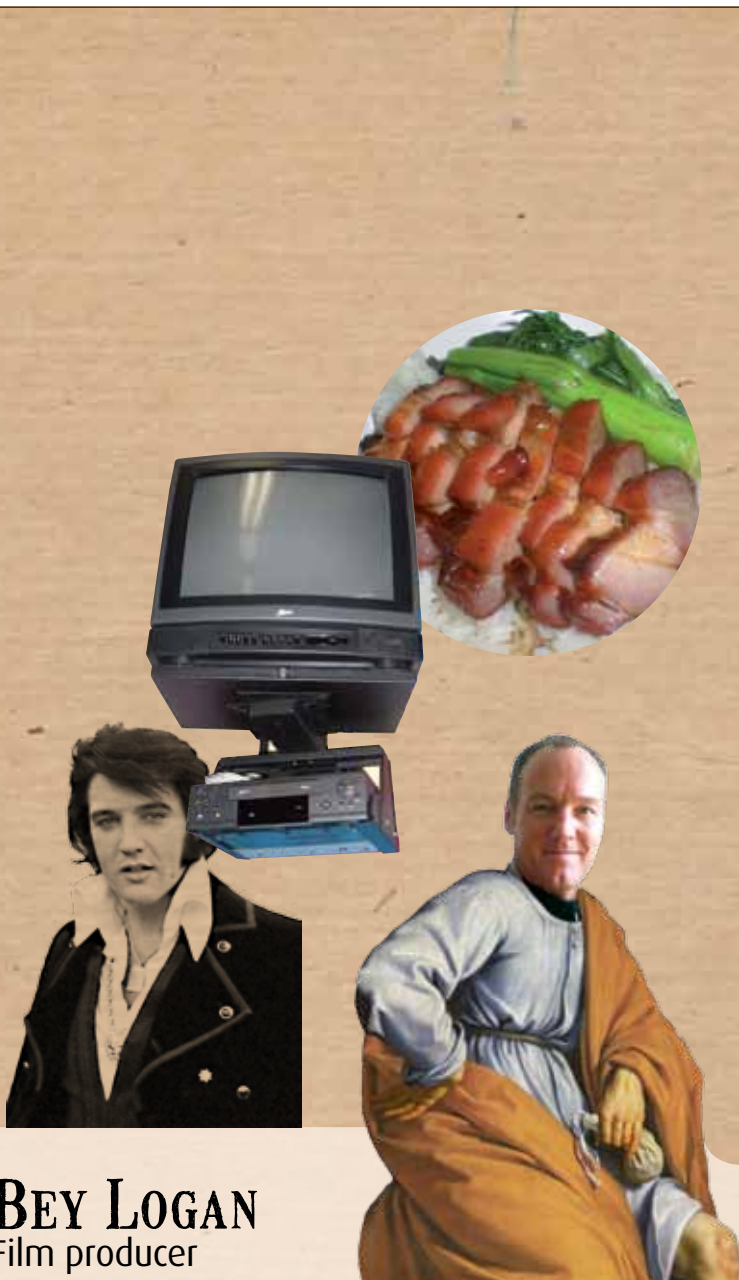
CEDRIC DELZENNE

Founder of online fashion shop Shop Des Createurs

I would like my last supper to be festive, with my friends from Hong Kong and the people who helped me make the most out of this amazing city. I would be leaving Hong Kong the day after for a six-month exploratory trip with my girlfriend (aka my style consultant) to the fashion capitals of the world, scouting for the talents of tomorrow in Buenos Aires, Rio, New York, London, Milano, Tokyo...

We would be on a secluded beach I discovered on Lantau island last weekend. I love to escape the bustling city on weekends and recharge my batteries before another crazy week. Fan Lau beach is the ideal place; get off the bus after the reservoir on your way to the Big Buddha. The trail starts as a road on the left, above the prison. (It is a good two-hour walk from the main road.) But that is our little secret... white sand, the clear blue sea and a few village houses make a picture-perfect scene.

The dress code would be casual—I’d be wearing a printed T-shirt from Parisian designer Marc Gulden, white linen trousers and a pair of Havaianas. And as for the food, I would start with a Thai pomelo salad, then move on to a set of dim sum dishes and finish with a chocolate fondant—my favorite dessert. I’ll be a traitor to French wine and pick a red from Chile—Casas Del Bosque 2007 (a blend of Syrah, Merlot and Pinot noir). I’ll be happy to cook myself, but I leave dessert to the pros! I particularly love **Epoch** in Wan Chai, so that would be an excellent place to get a tasteful chocolate cake from. I would want a meal that reflects the diversity of Hong Kong.



BEY LOGAN

Film producer

Here's a feasible exit scenario: the collusion between the boundless greed of the property developers and lack of vision on the part of the government has finally left Hong Kong over-regulated, over-polluted and devoid of its unique architecture and character, in which case I'd be moving to Melbourne, Australia (or somewhere equally "liveable")!

I'd go to the **Ser Wong Fun** restaurant at 30 Cochrane Street for a last taste of all their very local dishes. I wish I could pretend I had more sophisticated tastes, but I don't! I guess I'd just select a date and time and hope everyone else showed up! Everyone would consist of my (extended) family, including my numerous bratty yet beautiful children, plus my kung fu instructor Mak Chi-kong Sifu and a few others. In the film industry, unfortunately, you tend to have a fast turnover of friends and foes and friends turned foes, so I'd just stick with Clan Logan!

I have been to Ser Wong Fun many, many times. It's a family-run business; I joke with the waiters; the owner's son-in-law is my biggest fan (or so he says!). I can't remember my first visit, but I do remember being sold on both the ambience and the snake soup. It's a distinctively Hong Kong-ese venue. (It's just a shame they fenced off the back yard, hence the over-regulation I mentioned before...)

The place is very "local." They have the household altar, the statue of Kwan Gung, a white fridge with beer and Cokes... they also have laminated copies of their restaurant reviews on the walls.

They usually just have TVB playing on a set suspended from the ceiling. But if I had my choice of music for the last supper, it would be a blend of Elvis, The Beatles, U2 and some Motown classics, plus the Wong Fei-hung music and the theme from "Enter The Dragon."

We'd be chowing down on some snake soup, and then some sweet and sour pork, lemon chicken, char siu, fried rice, choi sum... all the good stuff! They'd be brought to the table in an endless kaleidoscopic array. This would be accompanied by a beer (or five!) from the fridge.

These distinctive Hong Kong restaurant dishes evoke memories of when I first ate Chinese food in various restaurants in the UK, and imagined how it would be to live in Hong Kong.

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AMY MA (Food) reporter at the Wall Street Journal

Hmm... what could make me leave Hong Kong? Perhaps if China's economic bubble bursts, and another recession sets in. The thing about Hong Kong is that it's transient. People pass through, and even though you always think you'll be back, sometimes you never pass by again. And yes, I'd exit with a bang. Why not?

You know that DHL blimp that's been floating up and down on the West Kowloon development site? I'd like to rent that. I have a childhood fascination for blimps and hot air balloons that never went away. Plus, once it goes up, you've got a captive audience who can't bail for the latest KEE Club party that's happening.

I'd go with an all-you-can-eat dim sum buffet catered by **Sun Tung Lok**—they have the most amazing ham sui gok (saltwater rice flour dumplings), sweet, buttery abalone puffs, and their signature invention: minced baby shrimp steamed and topped with a piece of crispy roasted pork skin (it looks like a tuna nigiri sushi). Nobody can beat the dim sum in Hong Kong. And if you don't have to wait in those two-hour-long lines, that's even better. For drinks, I would have a few cases of wine that date back to my 21st birthday. I've been popping the corks on them every time I move. The people dining with me would be the first 30 people that respond to the invitation. First come first serve, and you'll find that your best friends self-select into that group in the end anyways.



KIRI SINCLAIR Founder of PR Agency Sinclair Communications

My last supper would be a celebration of family and friends, with lots of stories, laughter and fun. It'd be, I dunno... the last day of summer? My family, extended family and I (30 of us) would be having seafood at **Loi Lam's Restaurant** in Tap Mun. We've been going to Tap Mun for as long as I can remember. It's one of my family favorites. We celebrate everything there, and often just celebrate life if we can't find another reason.

There are many great Cantonese seafood restaurants in Hong Kong, but none that match Tap Mun for freshness, and of course the view. It's a day out, and not just lunch. The ferry from Wong Shek Pier starts the journey, with a beer in hand. The stress of the working week melts away as soon as the wind blows in my face. And I love being out on the water. Tap Mun island is a real countryside getaway.

We'd be sitting at a fold-up round table with plastic tablecloth. The windows would be open, letting in a breeze. The sounds are of the water and the birds. The meal would include steamed fish, scallops with garlic and angelhair (mmm), deep-fried squid, bean curd, lots of veggies, steamed prawns. More scallops. And there will be wine. Lots of it. We'd bring it with us and make a long day of it. I know how to make most of these dishes myself, but they would never taste as good as Pekky and her team make it there. Fresh from the sea, the dishes taste like "home" to me. And Tap Mun is like a second home.

My last supper says a lot about me too—my love for Hong Kong's amazing country parks is what keeps me alive and happy. I love to be out hiking. I love the fishing village culture. I grew up in the New Territories, and as they say, you can't take the NT out of an NT girl.

Hair loss makes women look 10 years older

Recent research conducted by a renowned broadcasting company in the UK reveals that thinning or lacklustre hair can age a woman much more noticeably than wrinkles on her face.

Revealing research findings

Pairs of mothers and daughters were invited to help with the research, with each exchanging their hair styles by wearing hair wigs modeled on the body and texture of the hair of the other. A neutral panel then rated the appearances of the mothers and daughters before and after exchanging their hair styles. The findings are interesting – after changing to their daughters' hair styled wigs which gave them a full and healthy head of hair, observers suggested the mothers looked 8 to 10 years younger on average. However, the daughters looked 5 to 10 years older on average when putting on their mothers' hair styled wigs; generally this hair was thinner and duller. The findings indicate that the density and quality of hair affects a woman's age appearance as much as, if not more than, the complexion.

Keeping a youthful appearance

This ground-breaking research suggests today's woman should pay equal attention to the health and condition of her hair as she does to anti-aging treatments for the face. The strong conclusion is that we should consider professional hair care treatment at the first signs of thinning or unusual hair fall-out, as a vital way to keep a youthful, healthy appearance.

Take early remedial action

A Lady Svenson trichologist, Lea Tze, tells us that a woman's hair loss problems differ from a man's in several aspects. Unlike a man's receding hair line and advancing baldness, a woman's hair loss pattern is



more diffused – usually beginning with a broadening parting and scalp see-through. "Women tend to change their hair style or perm their hair to cover up the problem," says Lea, "but it just delays proper remedial treatment and can often make the situation worse. The first time you detect unusual hair fall-out or thinning, a detailed hair and scalp check-up and analysis is essential to find out the real causes of any problem. Only then can a tailor-made treatment programme be devised to rectify the condition and to regain lustrous and youthful hair."

Be alert to impending or actual hair loss

- ✓ Your family has a history of hair loss
- ✓ You suffer from dandruff or an oily scalp
- ✓ Lacklustre hair and split ends
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Fook Lam Moon

Shop 3, G/F, Newman House, 35-45 Johnston Rd., Wan Chai, 2866-0663.

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Tai Long Wan, Lantau.

Go Koong

Room 202, 2/F Inter-Continental Plaza, 94 Granville Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2311-0901.

Gold by Harlen Goldstein

2/F, LKF Tower, 33 Wyndham St., Central, 2869-9986.

Golden Gate Wine Co Ltd.

Suite 1006, Tai Yau Building, 181 Johnston Rd., Wan Chai, 2891-8181.

Koh-i-Noor

1/F, 3-4 Peninsula Mansion, 16C Mody Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2369-0783.

La Kasbah

4-8 Arbuthnot Rd., Central, 2525-9493.

Liberty Exchange Kitchen & Bar

G/F, Block 2, The Forum, 8 Connaught Rd., 2810-8400.

Liberty Private Works

3/F, 12 Wellington St., Central, 5186-3282.

Loi Lam's New Hon Kee Seafood Restaurant

4 Tap Mun Hoi Pong St., Tap Mun, Sai Kung, 2328-2428.

Lung King Heen

Podium 4, Four Seasons Hotel, 8 Finance St., Central, 3196-8880.

Mama Chau's Sichuan Kitchen

5B, Winner Building, 37 D'Aguilar St., Central, 8108-8550.

Magnolia

Shop 5, G/F, 17 Po Yan St., Sheung Wan, 2530-9880.

One-ThirtyOne

131 Tseng Tau Village, Shap Sze Heung, Sai Kung, 2791-2684.

Ser Wong Fun

G/F, 30 Cochrane St., Central, 2543-1032.

Sift

G/F, 46 Graham St., Soho, Central, 2530-4288.

Steakhouse Bar & Grill

18 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2313-2323.

Sun Tung Lok

Shop 4D, Miramar Shopping Centre, 132 Nathan Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2152-1417.

The 8th Estate Winery

Room 306, 3/F, Harbour Industrial Center, 10 Lee Hing St., Ap Lei Chau, 2518-0922.

The Chairman

G/F, 18 Kau U Fong, Central, 2555-2202.

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Shop B, 1/F, Hundred City Centre, 7-17 Amoy St., Wan Chai, 2838-5233.

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With spring just around the corner, every girl needs a perfume to match the balmy weather—and Anna Sui's Flight of Fancy fits the bill. With refreshing top notes of lychee, yuzu and java lemon; gentle floral middle notes of star magnolia, rose blossom and purple rain freesia; and sensual base notes of amber crystal, skin musk and white wood, this fragrance is bound to entice. A limited-edition tin, adorned with an exotic birdcage design, contains a stylish 50ml (\$485) or 75ml (\$625) bottle. Go grab one, and fly.

Available at Anna Sui Beauty Boutique, Shop C9, APM, Millenium City Phase 5, 418 Kwun Tong Rd., Kwun Tong, 3580-7091.



Fashion | Mix and Match



Want something leather and nice? A uniquely handcrafted leather collection from Tod's is this year's must-have. We particularly love the androgynous hand-braided bracelets. With a design that's both delicate and chic, they come in a stunning array of colors. A fun accessory to add to your daily outfit, get one in each color (\$1,600-\$2,300 each) for outfit-matching purposes. The collection also offers wallets, diaries, coin holders, keychains with charm hearts and beautiful cuffs.

Available at Tod's, Shop G19-20, The Landmark, Central, 2810-8692.

Shopping | Posh Pads



Apple's taking over the electronic world these days, and Tumi is keeping up-to-date by releasing beautiful leather cases for iPhones (\$510) and iPads (\$880). They come in a classic black or stylish grey crocodile print. Rumor has it that Apple will be coming out with the iPad 2 soon, so here's to hoping the cases will outlast the products they're holding.

Available at Tumi, Shop 131-132, Prince's Building, Central, 2869-7488.

Home | Chillin'

Realized your fridge isn't big enough after all that stocking and hoarding during CNY? Samsung RF62HERS comes to the rescue. This stylish refrigerator has a two-door design that ensures you'll have more than enough space to keep your food fresh from now on. And if your apartment is tiny, worry not—it occupies as little as 33 inches across. At the price of \$23,990, this sleek new appliance won't disappoint.

Available at major Broadway and Fortress outlets.



get the look

Flower Power

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1 Mink Pink Clarissa strapless dress, **Gizzy & Nacho**, \$540

2 Corola bag, **Anteprima**, \$7,695

3 KILIM cotton men's hobo bag, **Salvatore Ferragamo**, \$8,200

4 Trenno shoes, **Boss Selection**, \$4,100

5 Floral headband, **Monki**, \$30

6 Mancini shoes, **Paul Smith**, \$3,650

Gizzy & Nacho www.gizzynacho.com

Anteprima Shop 2081, IFC mall, 8 Finance St., Central, 2167-7386

Salvatore Ferragamo Shop 303, L/3, Pacific Place, 88 Queensway, Admiralty, 2845-2718

Boss Selection Shop 2093, Elements mall, 1 Austin Rd. West, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2730-2166

Monki Shop 29-31, L1, Langham Place, 8 Argyle St., Mong Kok, 3585-8026

Paul Smith Shop 216B, The Landmark, 16 Des Voeux Rd. Central, 2523-5868

open store



Helis & Tang Fine European Antiques

Conveniently located in SoHo, Helis & Tang carries fine European antiques dating back several centuries. The exterior of the shop oozes class, while the interior boasts an immaculate display of fine art, lamps and china. Laden with antiqued rugs and carrying brands such as Meissen, KPM Berlin, Baccarat, and Christofle, Helis & Tang sells everything from Neoclassical pieces to Art Nouveau. The store is cleverly arranged to showcase each antique in the way it was originally intended to be shown. We particularly love their selection of beautiful sterling silver.

38 Aberdeen St., Central, 9889-1308.

tech know



Dual Personality

With a plethora of touch-screen capable devices crowding the mobile phone market, Samsung has put themselves ahead of the rest with a phone that goes that little bit further. The Samsung B7722 (\$2,688) comes with the usual flashy 5.0 mega-pixel camera, Wi-Fi connectivity and a 16GB microSD card to store your home movies, favorite songs or drunken photos. Its main selling point, however, is that it has two SIM card slots—perfect for people with multiple identities to seamlessly juggle both work and personal life. It also boasts an intuitive handwriting recognition feature which detects English, Chinese and numeric digits for those times when you're too lazy to find a piece of paper. Now how handy is that?

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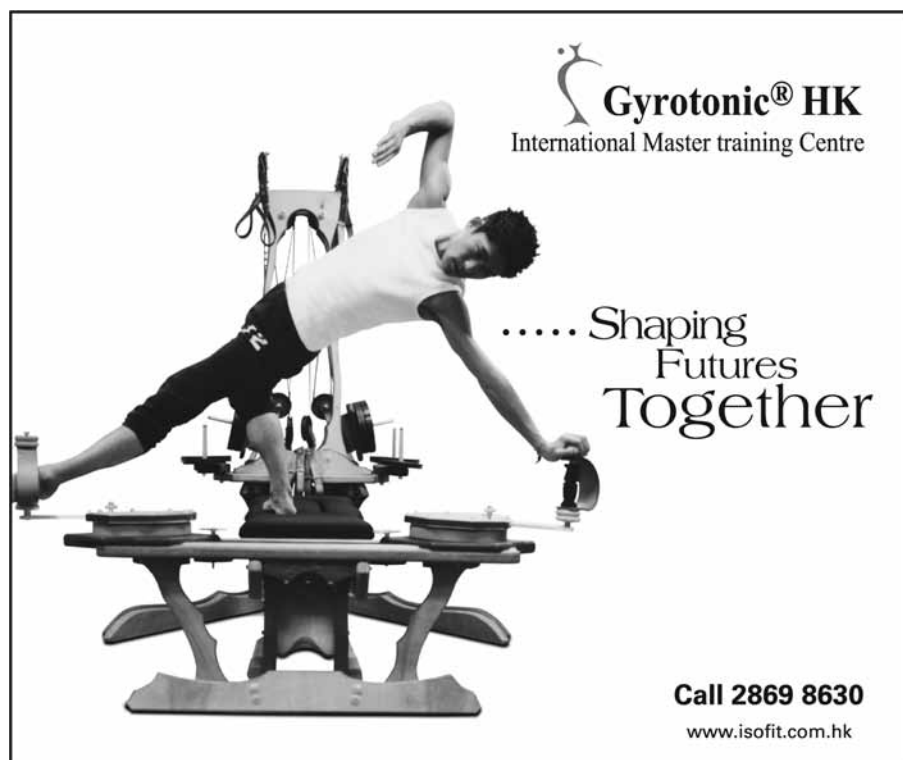
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SKIN DEEP
with Sarah Fung




Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

With much of my teen years spent wearing studded leather wristbands and black nail polish, I must admit that I'm fairly adept at creating the smoky eye look. But not everyone grew up goth, and many bemoan the fact that every time they try the sultry, black-rimmed look, they look more like a tarty panda than a sultry seductress. But fear not ladies: Max Factor has just launched a Smoky Eye Effect, a brand new crayon that means even the most cack-handed DIY-ers can achieve a decent smoky eye. The double-ended sticks come in six different shades, including silver, purple, brown and black, and all you need to do is color in the whole eye area with the lighter shade, and then add definition with the darker, tapered end. And with each crayon coming in at just \$98, you can afford to pick up a few sets and experiment.

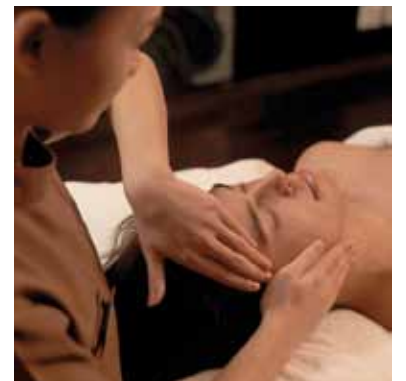
Available at **FACES, Ocean Terminal, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2110-1951.**

Manly Spa Redux

So remember Mike, my fan from the other week? Well, after I'd very kindly e-mailed him back with a list of "straight men's spas," the cheeky beggar had the gall to message me back requesting a list of mid-priced places! Listen, buddy, I'm not Mr. Know-It-All,

and I'm certainly not your personal concierge service—but seeing as it's the new year and all, I have just one more recommendation for you. I had a coffee last week with Dan of Seasons Fitness, who let me in on a little secret: Seasons Fitness also has a day spa for men and women, which not only is open to the public (though members get a 10 percent discount), it's priced firmly in the mid-range bracket, with an hour-long Swedish massage costing \$536. There are also tons of deals throughout the year; for instance, from now until the end of March, you can get a 90-minute Sothys vanilla and caramel facial for just \$680 (original price: \$980). How's that for a straight guy-friendly spa at the right price?

3/F, ICBC Tower, Citibank Plaza, 3 Garden Rd., Central, 2878-6288.



Make a Pass

So, the Pure Fitness at Two IFC has opened its doors again after its much-trumpeted \$1 million makeover. Want to see what all the fuss is about? If you're over 18 years old and have never been a member of Pure before, you're eligible to sign up for a one-week free pass to check out all the cool new facilities, including a climbing workout machine, hill running and rope fitness gear. For your free trial, register at www.pure-international.com.

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So-Called SoHo

James Fearnside visits the “SoHo” strip of restaurants in Sai Wan Ho to find that the little area has come into its own as a dining spot.



With no large department stores, no offices and certainly no big businesses, the quiet Soho East in Sai Wan Ho is nothing like its Central namesake. Pedestrians float by lazily in this relaxed cluster of restaurants where lunch hour is literally a walk in the park. An extensive range of restaurant choices, from Spanish to Italian, makes this neat dining pocket a must-go for those wanting to escape the hustle and bustle of downtown Central to eat by the sea.

Getting there:

From exit A at Sai Wan Ho station, turn right onto Tai On Street, left onto Lei King Road and finally right at Tai Hong Street to reach the Lei King Wan complex. Alternatively, a ferry service runs between Sai Wan Ho and Kwun Tong every 30 minutes.

Gitone

G/F, GB27-28, 45 Tai Hong St., Lei King Wan, Sai Wan Ho, 2527-3448

This art and dining fusion is one of the most interesting additions to the Soho East site. Part artistic workshop, part small restaurant, Gitone is an open-plan space dotted with easels, indoor plants and stainless steel-topped tables. Cages of (real) fluffy parrots make for unusual dining guests alongside vibrant paintings and cabinets filled with hand-crafted pottery. Every four months or so the menu changes between a Shanghainese, vegetarian or Cantonese set-menu, each costing \$380 per person. For

an additional \$250, diners can attend a one and a half hour ceramics or painting workshop before their meal in order to build up an appetite and expand their creative minds. At the time of writing, Gitone is serving up their Shanghainese menu of mouth watering delights including sliced beef shank and guava in wasabi sesame dressing, deep fried enoki mushroom and shrimp ball and their specialty: the braised chicken with red shallots and rock salt. As a general rule, Gitone does not allow walk-ins, so bookings are essential if you wish to enjoy a thoughtfully prepared meal in a very unique space.

Uncle Moustache

G/F, GC24-26, 35 Tai Hong St., Lei King Wan, Sai Wan Ho, 2967-6764

The unusual name of this restaurant comes from its colorful braces-wearing President—Stephen Shum—whose tuft of facial hair led his customers to adopt the moniker “Uncle Moustache.” Modeled on the dining hall of the Merryvale restaurant in the Napa Valley (huge wine barrels line one wall), Shum says his own private kitchen serves Chinese dishes in a European atmosphere. Each night the resident pianist serenades the room with soft piano music while lights are dimmed to allow diners to enjoy dinner by candle-light. How very Italian. One of their most interesting dishes, simply called “Send the lamb to the tiger”, is a barbecued pork chop stuffed inside a ball of minced tiger prawn meat, dunked in batter

and fried lightly in oil. Yet Shum’s kitchen is famous for another reason: a painstakingly crafted set-menu (\$600 or \$350 without wines) pairs each dish in the nine-course meal with a glass of wine. As a special offer until the end of March, Uncle Moustache is even offering a complimentary bottle of Chilean wine as a gift to everyone who orders from the set menu.

Chit Chat Oyster & Grill

G/F, GA8-9, 45 Tai Hong St., Lei King Wan, Sai Wan Ho, 2967-1666

Chit Chat’s specialty is the Lobster set for two complete with scrumptious seafood spread, which has people returning time and time again. Entrées consist of a warm shrimp or scallop salad, followed by lobster bisque or a warming white truffle soup. The main course includes a whole 20 ounce baked Australian lobster and New Zealand rib eye steak. Round this off with chocolate pudding or cheese cake with ice-cream, and for \$599 you can understand why people keep coming back.

Tapeo

G/F, GA01-03 G/F, 55 Tai Hong St., Lei King Wan, Sai Wan Ho, 2513-0199

Open for less than a year, this traditional Spanish-style tapas restaurant is furnished with plush red leather seating and includes a beautiful view of the harbor through its red bi-folding doors and large open windows.

Suitable for either lunch or dinner, Tapeo has a “passion for Iberian gastronomy” and offers an expansive selection of delectable tasting plates which its manager Piero Marongiu says “fits well with the local idea of dim sum—the sharing of food!” Their specialty is the crispy pork belly with quince aioli (\$62), which Piero says he can’t take off the menu for fear of backlash from regular customers. A selection of meat and seafood paella dishes is also available. With sangria soon to be added to their regular menu, this quaint harborfront resto will soon become the perfect spot for a warm evening out.

Marmalade

G/F, GC8, 35 Tai Hong St., Lei King Wan, Sai Wan Ho, 2884-4428

A simple layout, exposed concrete floors, plastic seats and faux-marble tables make up this quaint restaurant on Tai Hong street, serving everything from western breakfast to a number of tea sets. Their Chinese interpretation of an Italian dinner will cost you no more than \$68 for the set meal, which gives you five choices of baked duck, chicken stick or baked beef (all with rice or spaghetti) and a baked seafood rice in tomato sauce. An extremely cheap food and drinks menu means Marmalade is also an excellent spot for lunch. With clam spaghetti with garden herbs (\$39), pork chop bun (\$28) or a simple club sandwich (\$40) on the lunch menu, it’s a must for those on the go.



RESTAURANT REVIEWS

Noble Spice ★★★★★

Indian/Nepalese. 7/F, Cheung Hing Commercial Building, 37-43 Cochrane St., Central, 2854-0916.

The popular restaurant formerly known as Lovely Corner has undergone a makeover. Or so its management says, even though it might look the same to the untrained eye—Bollywood films blaring from the TV mounted in the corner and all. And all the old favorites are still on the menu—vegetarian and meat momos (a Nepalese dumpling that is the epitome of fabulous juiciness), the addictive samosa chat (chopped-up samosas smothered in cool, sweet yogurt sauce), the assorted curries, etc. But we poked and prodded and got the low-down. Now under new ownership, they’ve added peachy tablecloths and chair covers, as well as expanded the menu to include an array of tandoori dishes as well as naan. We tried the new lunch buffet—the old joint was only open for dinner and late-night debauchery—and it provided eminent satisfaction. Highlights included the vegetable curry with okra and the daal made from black-eyed peas. Unlimited access to the whole spread, plus a drink (choose from tea, a lassi or a soda) and naan, came to just \$68 per person sans service. Don’t be fooled by the Lovely Corner sign at the restaurant’s entrance; it’s on its way out soon, but was kept temporarily so as not to confuse or deter customers who have a hard time coping with change. Noble Spice is here to stay. Open Mon-Fri noon-3pm, daily 6pm-midnight. \$



On Lot 10 ★★★★★

French Provincial. 34 Gough St., Central, 2155-9210

We’ve walked by this restaurant time and time again without ever going in, not because it wasn’t beautiful and intimate (it is, complete with a romantic heated patio overlooking a cobblestone courtyard), or it was way too expensive (two-course lunch sets are just \$98), but more because it looked too good to be true. It’s not often that you come across a quaint French bistro serving quality food at affordable prices. Our lunch is off to a good start with homemade pâté provençale—chunky, country style pork pâté accompanied by green apple frisée salad. The decomposed Caesar salad, a creative spin on the original, playfully piles an entire quart of romaine, half of a runny egg, real bacon bits and salty sardines and is sprinkled with parmesan and drizzled with tangy dressing. Grilled salmon is served on a creamy bed of lentils, perfectly paired with the charred, crispy skin and moist, flaky fish. However, the showstopper is surely the whole oven-roasted Cornish hen, which is simply dusted with cracked black pepper, sea salt and fresh thyme. Owner and chef David has worked in Alain Ducasse’s top kitchens in America and Monaco (to name but a few), and gives his own interpretation of provincial French food without all the frills and frightening price tags. Good food matched with attentive service and white linens in Central? Well, it doesn’t get much better than this. Open Mon-Fri noon-2:30pm and 7-10pm, Sat 7-10pm. Closed Sunday. \$-\$\$



Hometown Dumpling ★★★★★

Shandong. 1/F, Soho Workstation, 110-118 Caine Rd., Mid-Levels, 2517-0969.

Full disclosure: we were loyal Hometown Dumpling customers even before its move from a modest ground floor space to a more posh first floor location down the street. And even with its new tacky floral chairs (versus the humble wooden stools that gave the former place an old world sort of vibe) and high-tech flatscreens blasting Korean dramas in the background, we still adore it. Hometown Dumpling has a dizzying selection of choices on its menu, but all you really need to experience are the dumplings (duh). On this particular visit, we ordered a dish of pan-fried pork and leek dumplings (which cost \$10 more than their steamed counterparts) and a plate of stir-fried Shanghai-style noodles. The skins of the dumplings were nice and tough, giving them that priceless chewy quality that made us fall in love with them the first time. The turn on the pan ensured a golden brown crispiness that contrasted with the tender meat inside. But they could’ve stuffed the dumplings with potatoes, for all we cared—they are THAT good. The Shanghai noodles had generous amounts of both sauce and grease, but that’s really what makes a great Chinese dish. The soy sauce was the perfect savory flavor and color—any darker and it would’ve been overkill, any less and it would’ve been too bland. Wash everything down with a glass of tea for the ultimate finale. Open daily 11am-10pm. \$



Price Guide

\$	Less than \$200
\$\$	\$200-\$399
\$\$\$	\$400-\$599
\$\$\$\$	\$600-\$799
\$\$\$\$\$	\$800 and up

Ratings

★	Never. Again.
★★	Completely forgettable
★★★	Pretty good
★★★★	Excellent
★★★★★	Unbelievable

Price per person, including one drink, appetizer, main course and dessert. Prices do not include bottles of wine unless stated.

Our Policy
Reviews are based on actual visits to the establishments listed, without the knowledge of the restaurants. Reviews are included at the discretion of the editors and are not paid for by the individual restaurants. Opinions expressed here are those of HK Magazine and our super-sneaky team of hungry reviewers. Menus, opening hours and prices change and should be checked. New restaurants are not reviewed within one month of their opening. Reviews are written from a typical diner’s perspective. A dining experience includes more than just food; ratings are also based on service, atmosphere and fun. Ratings are awarded in accordance with the type of restaurant reviewed, so the city’s best wonton noodle stall could earn a “Unbelievable” rating while a fancy French restaurant could be “Completely forgettable.”

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By el willy

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with Adele Wong



I made this!

Today I came back from a media lunch down the street and immediately the whole office knew I've had a few. Ah, the Asian curse! I'd had, like, three sips of red and even less of the white. It's just not fair!

Talk of the Town

Woohoo! I just realized my potential as chef extraordinaire after an amazing cooking session at **Sugar**, the happenin' lounge at the top of East Hotel (29 Taikoo Shing Rd., Island East, 3968-3968). For the hotel's first anniversary, it decided to provide lucky members of the media with lessons on how to make a restaurant-quality appetizer (tomato bruschetta), main dish (parma-wrapped sea bass), some rockin' desserts (rum ganache and raspberry tart malibu anglaise) and a cocktail (a mojito "reloaded"). OK, so maybe the meats and veggies were cooked for us, the seasonings prepared beforehand, the pastry shells already baked to a perfect crisp and professional chefs were at attention to correct our every mistake. But I was still damn proud once the products were finished, and a whole lot more confident about my cooking skills. So confident, in fact, that I intend to replicate the magic a second time at home! (Except for the chocolate ganache. Now that's just impossible to accomplish in a Hong Kong kitchen, no matter how pro you are).

Blue Smoke (15-16 Lan Kwai Fong, Central, 2816-9018) has introduced a new item on their menu: the turducken!! I remember vaguely hearing about the dish (which consists of a chicken stuffed inside a duck inside a turkey) from my American friends some time ago, and dismissing it as a typical Stateside gimmick. Well, gimmicky or not, I have to say I really enjoyed it when I got to try it the other night (along with plates and plates of mac and cheese). You just can't go wrong with so much meat.



A big pile of meat at
Blue Smoke

Caprice (Four Seasons Hotel, 8 Finance St., Central, 3196-8860) is serving up some fabulous black truffle dishes all throughout the month, but on one particular night (Feb 21!), the entire menu will be devoted only to these delicacies. So please mark your calendars and book fast if you want to take advantage of this special offer!

Who's Who

Royal Garden (69 Mody Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2721-5215) has a new (consultant) pastry chef. Loïc Poitou is French and has worked in Japan. (At least that's what the press release tells us, in those exact words.) Chef Loïc has the low-down on confectioneries, chocolates and ice creams, and was a chef pâtissier in many Japanese cake shops as well as Club Med in Kabira, Uganda. I've tried some of the pastries from Royal Garden before and remember being pretty impressed, but I'm sure Chef Loïc is just gonna take it up a whole other notch.



Watch Out For...

Rocco's (G/F, Shop G30, 96 Siena Ave., Discovery Bay, 2997-8688) is a fresh addition to the DBay scene, and literally the reason for my next visit to the island, whenever that may be. The resto will be serving surf 'n turf recipes alongside other classic dishes, so you can expect king prawn fajitas and grilled salmon as well as pork belly, wagyu beef and lamb cutlets. Pizzas and pastas are also available. It's a family-friendly place where you can relax with the kids or on your own while you enjoy the gorgeous shoreline in the distance.



Rocco's



Habibi

Where To Go...

...for a fine sumac-infused meal with exotic wines: **Habibi** (G/F, 112-114 Wellington St., Central, 2544 3886) will give you all that with their rich menu of sumac-anise crusted chicken,

lamb chops, rice pudding with almonds and raisins served alongside glasses of Yarden Chardonnay from Israel and Weninger Sopron Kekfrancos from Hungary. You'll be tasting the best picks of tippie from wine expert and resident consultant Annabel Jackson.

...for a scrumptious business lunch: **Whisk** at the Mira (118 Nathan Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2315-5999) has a fantastic express menu for those who can't afford to lounge around too long but still want a fine dining experience. It's not too good to be true: you can go for salads, escargot, strip loin, duck confit and pastas as well as a dessert and tea or coffee, all for \$218. And you'll be in and out in all of 45 minutes.

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Tiny (Scary) Dancer

Darren Aronofsky’s psychosexual thriller, one of this year’s Oscar favorites, stars Natalie Portman and Mila Kunis as rival ballerinas working together on a new production of Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake.” Sir Elton John once said that pretty, tiny dancers can make “Jesus freak out in the street.” Well, these ones will surely freak you out in the cinema. “Black Swan” review on **p.34**.



Hot Like Lava

In addition to its volcanic activity, the Kiwi nation now has some other hot stuff to offer: award-winning electronic DJ duo Maya Vanya. The pair of Croatian-born sisters will be blooping at Volar on Feb 25, **p.31**.

No Americano.

Utterly ubiquitous, Yolanda Be Cool is not content to merely dominate our local clubs with an endless loop of “We No Speak Americano.” No sir, they also have to come, in the flesh, right to our fair Island, look us straight in the eye, and then play “We No Speak Americano” live. Which is fine with us! It’ll be a hot show: Feb 25, **p.31**.

Bach is Back

Baroque music is big this year, duh. Renowned conductor Masaaki Suzuki headlines two highly anticipated shows at the 39th Hong Kong Arts Festival, which started on Feb 17. **p.26**.



Fri 18 Power Plant Various times, Kowloon Walled City Park. Enter an enchanted wonderland where glowing insects hum, vintage gramophones spin and everything is illuminated, p.29 . Skin Deep Above Second. Sonya Fu’s doll-like figurines may give us the creeps, but they’re images full of symbolism, p.29 .	Sat 19 Know your Schumann 7:30pm, Cultural Centre. Yip Wing-sie will guide your foray into the Romantic composer’s diverse body of work, p.26 . BauCo Electro 9:30pm, Xperience. The Bauhinia Collective presents local electronica demons BLAK, Sushi Robot and SnoBlind, p.31 .	Sun 20 Hobson’s Choice 7:30pm, Cultural Centre. The Birmingham Royal Ballet stages a merry tale about a lowly shoemaker who wants to make it big, p.26 . Tony Bevan Ben Brown Fine Art. The British artist’s structural mindset is evident in his expressive self-portraits, rendered with a complex framework of bold, crimson brushstrokes, p.29 .	Mon 21 Heat Voxfire Gallery. Works by eight rising Hong Kong artists tackle the steamy theme of sex in humorous and haunting ways, p.29 . Taylor Swift 8pm, AsiaWorld. Don’t miss this country-pop princess in her first live concert in Hong Kong, p.31 .	Tue 22 Putting it Together 8pm, Fringe Theatre. For the first time in Asia, Sondheim showcases his latest Broadway revue, recounting the story of an absurd dinner party through the eyes of his quirky characters, p.26 . The Sixth Day Gallery EXIT. Finding inspiration in the rugged nature of the biblical tales, Lin Xue’s ink drawings depict fantastical vines and wild shapes, p.29 .	Wed 23 Educating Rita 8pm, McAulay Studio. A bittersweet tale of a working-class girl’s search for knowledge and the professor that takes her on as his student, p.27 . The Beautiful and the Damned The Cat Street Gallery. Examining celebrity and mass consumerism, Zhivago Duncan showcases his Warhol-inspired artworks, p.29 .	Thu 24 Ruben Paul 8pm, Champs. Paul’s in-your-face American humor pokes fun at just about everything and everyone, p.26 . PUSH 9pm, FLY. Launched in 2009, PUSH is a Thursday regular, featuring DJs Frankie Lam, AKW, Lukas and guests, p.30 .
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<h3>Classical</h3> <p>Know Your Schumann What better way to romance your beau than with a little Schumann 101? Yip Wing-sie will guide your foray into Schumann’s body of work with historical references and insightful narratives. Featuring performances by soprano Yuki Ip, award-winning pianist Colleen Lee and cellist Chang Pei-chieh. Feb 18-19, 7:30pm. Concert Hall, City Hall, 5 Edinburgh Place, Central. \$100-220 from www.urbtix.hk.</p> <p>Zemlinsky’s Lyric Symphony Strauss’s Serenade in E-flat major and Metamorphosen, along with Zemlinsky’s Lyric Symphony, are on the Symphony Orchestra’s program. Feb 27, 8pm. Concert Hall, Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui. \$120-380 from www.urbtix.hk.</p> <h3>Concerts</h3> <p>Cameron Carpenter Organ Recital Being compared to the likes of Liberace and Fred Astaire is no small feat, especially on an organ, which seems better suited to a dusty cathedral than it does to a glittering world stage. But Grammy award nominee Cameron Carpenter (known as “the Jewel of Julliard”) has all the sass and jazz rhythm to actually make organs, well, cool. Feb 26, 8pm. Concert Hall, Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui. \$140-300 from www.urbtix.hk.</p>	<p>Masaaki Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan If you weren’t able to snatch up a ticket to Suzuki’s sold-out harpsichord recital this month, catch this Japanese virtuoso alongside members of his Bach Collegium Japan as they interpret some of Bach’s most riveting choral works and cantatas. Feb 20-21, 7:30pm. Concert Hall, City Hall, 5 Edinburgh Place, Central. \$120-520 from www.urbtix.hk.</p> <p>Music About China V To get things rolling as HK Arts Festival starts up, “Music of China” is an annual event that unveils the newest works by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra. Feb 27, 8pm. Concert Hall, City Hall, 5 Edinburgh Place, Central. \$120-300 from www.urbtix.hk.</p> <h3>Comedy</h3> <p>Ruben Paul Cameos in various American comedy shows including Def Comedy Jam and Russell Peters Presents have made Ruben Paul a notorious face on the comedy circuit. Paul’s edgy, in-your-face American humor pokes fun at just about everything and everyone. Feb 24-26, 8pm. Champs, B/F, The Charterhouse Hotel, 209-219 Wan Chai Rd., Wan Chai, 2833-9086. \$250 from www.takeoutcomedy.com.</p>	<h3>Dance</h3> <p>HK PICKS</p> <p>Hobson’s Choice The Birmingham Royal Ballet stages a merry little tale about a lowly shoemaker who wants to make it big. He finds the right person in Maggie Hobson, who turns both his luck and life around. Feb 18-20, 7:30pm. Grand Theatre, Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui. \$180-580 from www.urbtix.hk.</p>  <p>New York City Ballet One of the most anticipated shows of the 39th Hong Kong Arts Festival, the NYCB brings a two-part program to town. A testimony to George Balanchine’s legacy as both a founding father of the dance company and key choreographer, the lineup includes a selection of his greatest works, including “Serenade,” his first-ever show with the company. Various showtimes. Mar 3-7. Grand Theatre, Cultural Centre, 10 Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui. \$220-720 from www.urbtix.hk.</p>	<h3>Musicals</h3> <p>Piccadilly Revisited Based on the film noir classic, “Piccadilly Revisited” follows a jealous feud between two sultry cabaret dancers in a rambunctious West End nightclub. Cat fight, anyone? Original musical score by British Chinese composers Ruth Chan and Suki Mok. Feb 25-26, 8pm. Theatre, City Hall, 5 Edinburgh Place, Central. \$120-260 from www.urbtix.hk.</p> <p>Putting It Together Legendary composer Stephen Sondheim may have won more Tony awards than you can shake a stick at, but unless you’ve been to New York, chances are that you’ve never seen his shows live. For the first time in Asia, Sondheim showcases his latest Broadway revue, recounting the story of an absurd dinner party through the eyes of his quirky characters. Feb 22-26, 8pm. Fringe Theatre, Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Rd., Central, 2521-7251. \$150-295 from www.hkticketing.com.</p> <p>108 Heroes, Tales from the Water Margin Beijing opera just ain’t what it used to be. And thank God for that! This epic has been revamped to include rock music anthems and poppy beats along with classic kung fu scenes. Mar 4-6, 8pm. Lyric Theatre, Academy for Performing Arts, 1 Gloucester Rd., Wan Chai. \$140-420 from www.urbtix.hk.</p>
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Educating Rita

A bittersweet yet hilarious tale of a working-class girl's search for knowledge and the alcoholic university professor that finds redemption by taking her on as his student. Feb 23-26, 8pm. McAulay Studio, Arts Centre, 2 Harbour Rd., Wan Chai. \$190 from www.urbtix.hk.

Huit Femmes

Set in the 1950s, socialite Gaby lives with her wealthy industrialist husband Marcel, along with her mother, spinster sister, their teenage daughters and two gossiping maids in an estrogen-infused country estate. When patriarch Marcel winds up dead, the plot turns into a whodunit murder mystery. In French with English subtitles. Various showtimes including matinee performances. Mar 2-5. Fringe Theatre, Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Rd., Central, 2521-7251. \$180-240 from www.hkticketing.com.

In the Next Room or the Vibrator Play

A tongue-in-cheek comedy based on true historical accounts, the play tells of gynecologist Dr. Givings's alternative treatment for female hysteria—a primitive dildo. Hilarious as it is eye-opening, award winning playwright Sarah Ruhl sheds light on female sexuality during Victorian times. Various showtimes including matinee performances. Mar 9-12. The McAulay Studio, Arts Centre, 2 Harbour Rd., Wan Chai. \$180-220 from www.urbtix.hk.

UPCLOSE

Ruben Paul



Growing up in a black neighborhood, attending a Mexican high school, shopping at Asian supermarkets and praying in

an all-white church, American comedian Ruben Paul explains to Beverly Cheng how his muddled childhood made him see the funny side of life.

HK Magazine: You've appeared on many well-known comedy shows in the States. Do you prefer TV or live standup?

RP: It's like asking a parent which child they like more. I love the craft of acting, but the thing with comedy is that you do all of the writing and performing—essentially, you're a one-person play. If I had to lean towards one thing, though, it would have to be comedy right now because that's what pays my bills.

HK: Having opened for big names, including Jamie Foxx, Cedric the Entertainer and Bernie Mac, who would you say has been your biggest inspiration so far?

RP: In terms of seeing someone struggle and then becoming famous—George Lopez. He struggled 22 years before getting his big break. He taught me that you just have to believe at the end of the day.

HK: How did you find your calling as a comedian?

RP: I grew up watching Eddie Murphy as a kid and I thought he was hilarious! In school, I was always joking around and being the class clown, though I took school seriously. I always really loved making people laugh.

HK: How did your childhood shape your comedy?

RP: My parents are from Haiti. When they moved to America, we lived in an all-black neighborhood, but my high school was all Mexicans. And in Carson [California], there's a big Filipino community. Growing up with so many cultural influences is the foundation of who I am as a person and it has found a way into my comedy.

HK: Do you like poking fun at cultural stereotypes?

RP: I think stereotypes come from truth, and that's why people think they're funny. But I know that not every single Asian is a bad driver and not all black people are great dancers.

HK: Have you ever been heckled?

RP: Of course! I grew up doing black clubs where you get heckled before you even say hello. You just deal with it. It's survival. Comedy is not for the meek. But if you yell out and heckle me, you'll regret it.

HK: What's your comedy style like?

RP: Most comedy comes from pain and anger, but my comedy is about love, acceptance and respecting one another.

HK: Is this your first time in Asia?

RP: I've entertained [American] troops in Japan and Korea. But when my friend, Paul Ogata, told me about a gig in Hong Kong, I was like, "Hong Kong? Do they even speak English over there?"

HK: Are you going to tweak your material to suit Asian audiences?

RP: I pride myself on doing my thing. No matter where you're from, we kinda all have the same human experiences. Just because you're Asian, I'm not going to do all these Asian jokes.

Need more laughter in your life? TakeOut Comedy presents Ruben Paul on Feb 24-26. More details on p.26.

Tête-à-Tête with Michelin star at Sofitel Macau

William Frachot, renowned Michelin starred chef from Dijon, France will reveal the secret of authentic French cuisine throughout a six-day gastronomical journey at Sofitel.

With over 20 years experience in authentic French cuisine, William worked with various legendary top chefs in France that infused him with passion for the profession.

Recognized as "One of The Best Young Chefs" by GaultMillau d'Or magazine, his cooking are full of creative contemporary, crossing borders yet highlighting both French tradition and the encounters of his travels.

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30 lux
An exhibition named for the minimum light voltage level required for fire exits according to the Buildings Department’s Code of Practice for the Provision of Means of Escape (complicated, we know), local photographer Virgile Simon Bertrand shoots emergency routes in unidentified buildings, capturing their uniform simplicity in design. Through Feb 26. 2P Contemporary Art Gallery, G/F, Shop 5, Poga Building, 6-20 Po Tuck St., Sai Ying Pun, 2803-2151.

Playing in Heaven
Chinese sculptor Qu Guangci attempts to depict China’s collective memory through his comical sculptures, such one of a revolutionary donning rabbit ears and a bow tie. Through his use of absurdist symbols, Guangci reveals the darker side of the human psyche. Through Feb 27. Aura, Shop MW3, The Peninsula Hotel, Salisbury Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 2368-1068.

In the Midst of Hustle & Bustle
Capturing crowds of people on the move with his colorful cardboard cutouts, Spencer Luk portrays scenes from everyday life and the hectic city lifestyle to which we’ve become immune. Through Feb 24. MobArt, G/F, Tai On Terrace, Sheung Wan, 3488-1106.

Reminiscences
In celebration of Chinese New Year an extensive collection of works on canvas by renowned Chinese realists are on display, including Wang Yihua, Zhu Yiyong, Pan Xun, Li Xiaoming, Liu Changwen and Tian Haibo. Through Feb 28. Galerie du Monde, 1/F, Room 108, Ruttonjee Centre, 11 Duddell St., Central, 2525-0529.

HK PICKS

The Beautiful and the Damned
An American-born Syrian-Danish artist, Zhivago Duncan, presents his Warhol-inspired mashup of Pop art with a punk aesthetic. Reexamining the role of celebrity and mass consumerism in the 21st century, many have their eye on Duncan, including art connoisseur Charles Saatchi. Through Mar 5. The Cat Street Gallery, 222 Hollywood Rd., Sheung Wan, 2291-0006.



Existential Emptiness
For her first solo show in Hong Kong, Cui Xiuwen explores the theme of the female experience in modern China through a series of monochromatic digital photos set in snow-capped scenes in the country’s northern parts. Through Mar 5. Blindspot Gallery, 24-26A Aberdeen St., Central, 2873-3819.

HK PICKS



Space (Touching the Void)
As a local artist and Six Pack of Wolves musician, Vickie Chan focuses on the lack of space in Hong Kong as the subject matter of her first solo show. Through Mar 5. Culture Club Gallery, 15 Elgin St., Central, 2127-7936.

Women Artists 211
Seems like the art scene’s no longer a sausagefest. Another exhibition devoted to all things female, this show encompasses everything from painting to printmaking by 10 influential artists in Hong Kong, who just so happen to be women. Through Mar 8. Sin Sin Annex, 53-54 Sai St., Central, 2334-9423.

Power Plant
Walk through the stone walls of Kowloon Walled City Park and enter into an enchanted wonderland where glowing insects hum, vintage gramophones spin and everything is illuminated. Four entry times daily: 8pm, 8:30pm, 9pm and 9:30pm (closed Mondays). Through Mar 13. Kowloon Walled City Park, Tung Tsing Rd., Kowloon City, 2716-9962. \$20 from www.urbtix.hk.

My Three Friends
Known for being a keen collector of Chinese antiquities, Dr. Leung Kam-ching shows off the contemporary works in his collection for a change. Featuring pieces by Lu Chen, Zhou Sicong and Shi Hu, a selection of 60 paintings and calligraphy works, in mostly ink and color, will be on display. Through Mar 15. University Museum and Art Gallery, Hong Kong University, 94 Bonham Rd., Pok Fu Lam, 2241-5508.




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Hong Kong First
Having exhibited at the MoMA and throughout Europe and the Americas, Romanian-born Dan Perjovschi presents his recent collection of provocative, politically-charged illustrations. Through Apr 17. Para/Site Art Space, 4 Po Yan St., Sheung Wan, 2517-4620.

Simulacrum
See the next chapter of the UK art scene, the new generation of Young British Artists, with contemporary art pieces by David Mabb, Georgina Amos, Rory McCartney, Peter Lloyd Lewis, Tina Hage and Jonathan Baker. Feb 25-Mar 15. Moon Gallery, 111 Queen’s Rd. West, Sheung Wan, 2858-1771.

Skin Deep
Local digital artist Sonya Fu’s doll-like figurines may give us the creeps, but beyond their skewed eyes, porcelain white skin and gothic costumes are images full of symbolism. Through Mar 15. Above Second, 31 Eastern St., Sai Ying Pun, 3483-7950.

Bloom
Founder of the Hong Kong Society of Botanical Artists, Julia Patience paints exotic flowers from her travels across Southeast Asia in vivid hues. Feb 19-Mar 19. Saffron Cafe & Gallery, Dairy Farm Building, 100 Peak Rd., 6392-5352.

Forgotten Promises
British bad boy Damien Hirst headlines the much anticipated grand opening of the Gagosian Gallery. With the days of a shark stewing in formaldehyde behind him, this provocative exhibition witnesses the evolution of Hirst’s iconic skull, diamond and butterfly imagery to shape his most recent works, such as “For Heaven’s Sake,” a life-sized human baby skull cast in platinum and covered in over 10,000 brilliant diamonds. Through Mar 19. Gagosian Gallery, 7/F, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., Central, 2151-0555.

Heat
The launch of Voxfire Gallery, Sheung Wan’s newest art space, presents works by eight rising Hong Kong artists. In light of Valentine’s day, artists tackle the steamy theme of sex in humorous and haunting ways using various media. Proceeds from sales will be donated to the Hong Kong AIDS Foundation for HIV prevention. Through Mar 19. Voxfire Gallery, 1/F, 52 Gage St., Sheung Wan, 2581-3358.

The Sixth Day
For his second solo show, local artist Lin Xue shows his newest series of drawings inspired by the Old Testament. Finding inspiration in the wilderness and rugged nature of the biblical tales, Xue’s ink drawings depict fantastical vines twisting around wild organic shapes. The series also includes polaroid drawings with Caroline Chui. Through Mar 21. Gallery EXIT, G/F, 1 Shin Hing St., Central, 2541-1299.

Reincarnation of Matter
Capturing the transformation of matter through decomposition and erosion, So Hing-keung’s beautifully minimalist photographs comment on eastern views of incarnation through the depiction of “undying” materials. Through Mar 27. The Upper Station, 22 Upper Station St., Sheung Wan, 3486-2474.

Tony Bevan
Regardless of genre, Bevan’s structural mindset is evident in his expressive self-portraits rendered with a complex framework of bold, crimson brushstrokes. Feb 19-Apr 9. Ben Brown Fine Arts, Pedder Building, 12 Pedder St., Central, 2522-9600.

Art for Baby
Who knew that fashion and high art could mix so well? This exhibition showcases the 20th century’s most prolific painters from America, Europe and Asia, with works by Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Julian Ope and Takashi Murakami. Through Apr 30. The Louis Vuitton Gallery, Louis Vuitton Mansion, 5 Canton Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 8100-1182.

Sleeping Forest
Chinese artist Wang Xi addresses eco concerns in his paintings of trees and Chinese landscapes. Through his simplistic artworks, Xi calls for harmony between humans and the envrionment we inhabit. Through Feb 28. Asia Fine Art, G/F, 12 Sik On St., Wan Chai, 2522-0405.

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**AFTER
HOURS**
with
Johannes
Pong

After a hypnotically soothing 60-minute therapeutic massage session with Mr. Valli at the Landmark MO's Oriental Spa, as recommended by one of the PRs, I uncharacteristically decided to enter the hamam for a rare state of repose. Yes, rare—I usually prefer vitality pools to steam rooms. Rebelling against my own spa rituals, I palpably felt that 2011 would become a year full of new hopes and possibilities. While sweating all my toxins out and gazing at the quartz stone set in the middle of the tiled grotto, I came to the conclusion that the new year would bring release from old paradigms of beliefs and concepts—a breakout year preparing many for the dramatic events of the following 2012.

And the positive vibes are simply electrifying. With the arrival of the Metal Rabbit, the world witnessed Lady Gaga's scintillatingly thunderous first performance of "Born This Way" at the Grammys, her (latest) magnum opus for empowering just about everyone on the planet, in the form of the campiest, catchiest pop anthem tailor-made for the clubs' dance floors. It's like Express Yourself 2011 with totally fly German techno and trance beats. While "Bad Romance" was euphoric dementia, "Born This Way" is a fierce dose of uplifting positivity for the inhabitants of this planet.

Then there's the freeing of Egypt. There is something immensely powerful in the emancipation of a country as old as recorded history itself. And it's creating a domino effect in the Islamic world. Now Muslims are like, hello? We CAN take it to the streets and create change. Celebrating the remarkable events in Egypt leading to Hosni Mubarak's resignation, Hosni Emam (yes... it's a fairly common Arabic name—meaning "excellence"), founder and CEO of Habibi Group, is offering all of us in HK a complimentary glass of sparkling wine or fresh mint tea between 4pm and 8pm at Rana Raj, Habibi Café and Café Roma; and 6-8pm at Habibi, until the end of March. "This was a dynamic, youth-led revolution of people who voted with their feet. Free at last!" says the Hosni in HK, who was born in Cairo. "I want to offer my congratulations to Egyptians and to the rest of the Middle East," he adds.

And to commemorate all of those who lost their lives during these courageous demonstrations, Habibi Group will donate 5 percent of its earnings from all four outlets to create a Wall of Honour in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the epicenter of the protests. Additionally, to mark the key role played by media such as Al-Jazeera, CNN and BBC in the liberation of Egypt, foreign correspondents eating at the outlets will get a 40 percent discount on their food. Dayem, does that include freelance columnists as well?

Perhaps it's because of Saint Valentine's Day that I'm feeling prophetic. Valentinus means worthy/strong/powerful in Latin, not romantic love. And with the Spring Equinox coming soon next month, my forecast is that there will be more positive change in the Middle East. Thrilling!

I'm off to spend my Valentine evening with Janet Jackson. And I predict that I'll completely ignore my date and partake in the exhilarating dope known as mass hysteria, and offer my undying love and devotion to Miss Jackson. I'll most likely scream, sing, shed tears, get da-da-da-da-da-da-da-down on the floor and lose my voice after the concert.

Post script: I lost my voice after experiencing Janet in the building! OMFG she dedicated "If" to Hong Kong! I hyperventilated~~!!!! Bish, you deadlyyyyyyyyy. And yes, I ignored my date. Janet, you mah boo, Miz Thang!!!! MUAH.

Email jpong@asia-city.com.hk, follow him on Twitter, and become a fan, or hater, on Facebook.

Clubs

Classic Spirit

A Wednesday regular featuring Hong Kong's veteran DJ Roy Malig spinning the best of house, soul and funk, blended with afro, reggae, acid jazz and nu-disco. Feb 23, 10pm. Aqua Spirit, 30/F, Penthouse, 1 Peking Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 3427-2288. Entry: \$150 minimum spend.

PUSH

Launched in December 2009, PUSH has now come to the newly opened Fly as the club's Thursday regular. DJs Frankie Lam, AKW, Lukas and guests will spin deep, dirty house and techno. Feb 24, 9pm. Fly, 24-30 Ice House St., Central, 2810-9902. Free. Happy hour extended to 11pm.

HK PICKS

Laurent Garnier "Live Booth Session"

The French techno master (aka Choice) is known for his broad DJ style and was a resident at London's notorious club "The End." He'll be joined by two other French electronic DJs, SCAN X and Benjamin Rippert, to throw a party you won't forget. Feb 19, 10pm. Volar, B/F, 38-44 D'Aguilar St., Central, 2810-1510. \$350 includes two drinks.



Electric Spirit
DJ Darka, champion of the “Hong Kong Pioneer DJ Competition” in 2003, will be mixing unique blends of electro and house beats every Thursday throughout February. Feb 24, 10pm. Aqua Spirit, 30/F, Penthouse, 1 Peking Rd., Tsim Sha Tsui, 3427-2288. Entry: \$150 minimum spend.

HK PICKS



Mark Farina
San Francisco DJ/producer Mark Farina is bringing his unique infusion of mushroom jazz, acid jazz and urban beats to Hong Kong. Supported by DJs Romi B, Arun R and Adrian Armirail. Feb 24, 9pm. Hush, 2 Glenealy, Central, 2537-2281. \$100 advance or \$150 at door, both include a drink.

Yolanda Be Cool

The hot new Aussie swing house duo's single “We No Speak Americano” topped the charts around the globe last year, and was played EVERYWHERE. Now they'll be coming to Hong Kong for one night only as part of their first Asian tour. Feb 25, 10pm. Hyde, 2-3/F, Lyndhurst Tower, 1 Lyndhurst Terrace, Central, 2850-6283. \$250 advance or \$300 at door, both include a drink.

Bulletproof Kitten Mafia ft. Maya Vanya

Get ready for a night of girl power as a stylish all-female DJ lineup, consisting of Miss Yellow, Wendy Wenn and international guest Maya Vanya, awaits you. Hailing from Auckland, New Zealand, sister duo Maya Vanya won the “Next Generation DJ Contest” last year, and are promising stars in the electronic music scene. Feb 25, 11pm. Volar, B/F, 38-44 D'Aguilar St., Central, 2810-1510. \$350 includes two drinks.

Winter Daybreak

After a hot, sweaty night of dirty house and techno last summer, the Daybreak party is back with PUSH residents Frankie Lam, Lukas and AKW, as well as DJ A-Pak, DJ Ball and Japanese techno champion Imai Fukutaro, who will all come armed with the freshest house and techno. Feb 26, 5pm. For more info, call 3552-3388. Free with side dishes and finger food.

I Love 80s: Movie Stars

Hong Kong's first night dedicated to all things 80s, and hold onto your legwarmers, because the launch party is movie-themed. There will be prizes on the night for the best outfits, so revisit your fave 80s flicks, from “Ghostbusters” to “Top Gun,” and everything in between. DJ collective The Milky Bar Kid & Friends will be on the deck all night long. Feb 26, 10pm. Dharma Den, 2/F, The Workstation, 43 Lyndhurst Terrace, Central, 9813-1579. \$100 with drink promotions.

Red Bull BC One Hong Kong Cypher

Hip-hop dance lovers: don't miss the first-ever Hong Kong stop of the Red Bull BC One series, the world's premier BBoy competition. Over 200 local BBoys will battle it out on the dance floor for the chance to represent Hong Kong in the BC One Asian Qualifiers in Taipei in June, and even compete at the BBoy World Championships later this year. Feb 27, 6pm. Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre, 30 Pak Tin St., Shek Kip Mei. Free.

Stefano Noferini

The founder of house label Deeperfect Records, internationally recognized Italian house DJ Stefano Noferini has taken his grooves to some of the best clubs in the world. Now get ready to take him on Drop's dance floor. Supported by DJs Eric Byron and Steve Yau. Mar 11, 9pm. Drop, B/F, On Lok Mansion, 39-43 Hollywood Rd., Central, 2543-8856.

Gigs

Eric Clapton

Who else has won 17 Grammys, ranked fourth in Rolling Stone's “100 Greatest Guitarists of All Time” and is the only triple inductee into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame? Yes, Clapton, one of the world's most legendary musicians, is back again after a sold-out Hong Kong concert in 2007. Feb 18, 8pm. AsiaWorld, Chek Lap Kok. \$488-1,488 from www.hkticketing.com.

BauCo Electro

The Bauhinian Collective presents an electro special featuring local electronica duos BLAK, Sushi Robot and SnoBlind. And it's gratis! Feb 19, 9:30pm. Xperience, G/F, Asia Oriental Tower, 33 Lockhart Rd., Wan Chai, 2143-6008. Free.

Pete Moore

Australian jazz/soul singer Pete Moore and his band The Martini Nation will bring you a night of old school swing, singing hits by Ray Charles, Elvis, Sinatra and more. Feb 19, 9pm. Grappa's Cellar, Jardine House, 1 Connaught Place, Central, 2521-2322. \$200 includes a drink.

HK PICKS

Taylor Swift

The country-pop princess may be just 20 years-old, but no one sells multi-platinum albums and collects Grammys quite like Taylor Swift. Oh, and have we mentioned she made Kanye apologize? Don't miss her first live concert in Hong Kong. Feb 21, 8pm. AsiaWorld, Chek Lap Kok. \$380-780 from www.hkticketing.com.



Wheel2Wheel: Bon Voyage Rock Concert

The fundraising concert benefits the 10 charitable organizations supporting Wheel2Wheel, the self-funded, 100-day, 20,000 kilometer motorbike expedition, which starts from Hong Kong on Mar 1. Lineup includes indie acts Gong Wu, Noughts & Exes, Absolut Crap, Donner and Blitzen, Uranus and DJ K-Ling. Feb 25, 8pm. Grappa's Cellar, UG/F, Jardine House, 1 Connaught Place, Central, 2521-2322. \$1,000 from www.wheel2wheel.tv or Grappa's, includes a drink.

Half-Baked

Metal Postcard Records and The Terrible Twin present a not-to-be-missed indie-fest featuring Phnom Penh-based psychedelic garage band The Cambodian Space Project, Shanghai noise rock duo Pairs and local acts The Sleeves, BLAK and Luke Chow. In addition, there'll also be an indie fashion show by Beijing's iconic street brand Plastered 8, and a DJ set by Casey Anderson. Mar 5, 8pm. Saffron on the Peak, Dairy Farm Building, 100 Peak Rd., The Peak. Call 9196-2993 for more info. \$100 advance from Saffron outlets, or \$125 at door.



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OPEN BAR California Vintage



The buzz: The first bar in Hong Kong to exclusively serve Californian wine and at the same time rustle up scrumptious Napa Valley-inspired meals.

The décor: There is clearly an emphasis on wine here; most of the décor is taken up with bottles, but rust paint has been liberally applied to obtain that "California wine country" look. An open kitchen and a combination of timber and polished concrete give this bar a comfortable winery feel.

The drinks: Obviously you wouldn't order anything less than a glass of vino, with wines imported from family-run wineries all over California. There are over 72 different bottles to select from their "Napa Winestation" dispensers, so you've got more choice than you know what's good for you. Wines are available by the taste, half-glass or full-glass pour.

The food: The owners have spent considerable time creating a seasonal pairing menu—grouping select wines with certain dishes. Each food item on the menu is arranged according to which grape varieties suit the ingredients in the meal. Crisp white wines go with the gilroy garlic fries, for example, while the bold tannic reds pair well with the California flatbread topped with grilled Angus beef flat-iron steak and Pt. Reyes blue cheese.

Why you'll be back: For the bar's weekly featured wines, interactive wine-knowledge iPads and their sommelier-hosted lunches. **James Fearnside**

77 Wyndham St., Central, 2525-9808.

Michael Bublé

Craving something classy and dreamy? How about Michael Bublé?! The Grammy award-winning Canadian singer is coming to Hong Kong for one night only as part of his "Crazy Love Tour" in support of his fourth album, "Crazy Love." Mar 11, 8pm. Hall 5BC, HKCEC, 1 Expo Drive, Wan Chai. \$588-1,588 from www.hkticketing.com.

The Whitest Boy Alive

The Berlin-based fourpiece will soon be bringing their unique brand of catchy, organic funk-inspired dance music to Hong Kong for the first time ever. Be sure you don't miss out on seeing this incredibly talented quartet in the flesh. Mar 17, 8pm. Auditorium, HITEC, 1 Trademart Drive, Kowloon Bay. \$400 from www.hkticketing.com.

Eagles

Having sold more than 120 million albums worldwide, the six-time Grammy-winning rock band is a bona fide legend in music history. Listening to "Hotel California" live is something you can't miss. Mar 18, 8pm. AsiaWorld, Chek Lap Kok. \$588-2,088 from www.hkticketing.com.

Katherine Jenkins

The Welsh soprano is one of the world's most successful classical-pop crossover singers, famous for her unique renditions of opera arias, musical numbers and pop songs. Mar 20, 8pm. Hall 5BC, HKCEC, 1 Expo Drive, Wan Chai. \$580-880 from www.hkticketing.com.

Slash

Who'd have thought the Guns N' Roses axeman would be back so soon? But it's happening! This time, he'll be joining forces with Alter Bridge frontman Myles Kennedy and special guests Twenty Two Hundred from Melbourne, Australia. Mar 22, 8pm. HITEC Star Hall, 1 Trademart Drive, Kowloon Bay. \$580-880 from www.hkticketing.com.

MGMT

Here's a gig that you have every reason to be psyched about. The Grammy-nominated Brooklyn psych-rock masters wowed us in 2007 with their debut album, "Oracular Spectacular" (named by Rolling Stone as the 18th best album of the decade). Following the release of their sophomore album "Congratulations," the boys will come to town to play for one night only. Mar 30, 8pm. HITEC Star Hall, 1 Trademart Drive, Kowloon Bay. \$400-580 from www.hkticketing.com.

The Script

Hailing from Dublin, pop rock trio The Script won "Best Selling Irish Act" at the 2008 World Music Awards with their eponymous debut album. They've also played stadium shows alongside U2 and Take That. Now, with some Irish luck, it's time to headline their own concert (their first in Hong Kong). Apr 14, 8pm. HITEC Star Hall, 1 Trademart Drive, Kowloon Bay. \$480-680 from www.hkticketing.com.

Maroon 5

Following the release of their brand new album "Hands All Over," the LA-based funk/pop rock band, fronted by Adam Levine, is coming to perform their sexy love songs in Hong Kong. Book your tickets now in case you never see their faces again! May 21, 8pm. AsiaWorld, Chek Lap Kok. \$380-780 from www.hkticketing.com.

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Hong Kong Brew House Draft beers from \$40. Daily, 3pm-9pm. G/F & Basement, 21 D'Aguilar St., Central, 2522-5559.

Hyde Two-for-one on all standard drinks. Daily, 6pm-9pm. 2/F-3/F, Lyndhurst Tower, 1 Lyndhurst Terrace, Central, 2522-2186.

Living Room All you can drink premium wines by the glass and cheese tasting, with live DJ, for \$198. Wed, 9pm-11pm. W Hotel Hong Kong, 1 Austin Rd. West, West Kowloon, 3717-2222.

McSorley's Thirty percent off for all drinks. Mon-Fri, 5pm-8pm. 55 Elgin St., Central, 2522-2646.

Peak Bar Happy hour prices on selected beers. Daily, 3pm-9pm. 9-13 Shelley St., Central, 2140-6877.

Tazmania Ballroom Two-for-one drinks and free canapé buffet. Daily, 5pm-8pm. 1/F, LKF Tower, 33 Wyndham St., Central, 2801-5009.

Volar Thirty percent discount for all drinks. Tue-Fri, 6pm-9pm. B/F, 38-44 D'Aguilar St., Central, 2810-1510.



THE STRAIGHT MAN with Yalun Tu

Valentine's Day Blunders

My top Valentine's Day blunders, all flowers-related, in chronological order:

Guangzhou—2002

I was living in Beijing on a study abroad program and our class took a trip down to Random Factorytown, Southern China, aka the most romantic place in the world. At the time I was kinda sorta seeing this girl, by which I mean I told everyone she was my GF and she told everyone we were "just having a good time" and "making out with other guys is OK." I'm like the Zagat guide of relationship woes.

Based on this, I decided that on Valentine's Day I was definitely single, and my friend Steve and I thought we should get a gift for the girls in our program. Our rationale was simple: if we get every girl a gift then it is just a nice and thoughtful thing from two guys and not weird and creepy? Right? Wrong.

Steve and I delivered flowers we had meticulously chosen from a market to all of their hotel rooms with a carefully prepared speech about how we think they are nice human beings and everyone should have flowers on Valentine's Day. This, it turned out, was a mistake.

We got four thanks-for-the-pity responses, three I-never-knew-you-guys-felt-this-way and one girl who just stared at me blankly, took the flowers, closed the door and didn't talk to me for three months. The overarching message was either "Why did you get me flowers? This is creepy," or "Thanks, but I just think of you as a friend." Sigh. There was actually one girl, Dawn, who was genuinely pleased and happy and said, "Thank you so much for the friendship flowers." And she was the only girl I actually liked, so even that backfired.

At least I learned a valuable lesson: if you get a girl flowers on Valentine's Day to be nice, it WILL be misinterpreted. Unfortunately I forgot that in future years...

Boston—2003

This should have been an awesome Valentine's Day, given how it started out, but things went wrong very quickly.

I was minding my own business listening to LFO's "Summer

Girls" on my portable CD player when this girl stopped me on the street and we had this conversation. I swear to God this is 100% true:

Girl: Do you have a girlfriend?

Me: No

Girl: Well, give these to somebody you like. I don't want them [hands me a bouquet of roses]

Me: Thanks!

And bam, I had this awesome bouquet of roses. The only problem was I was on the way to basketball practice, and you don't show up there with a bunch of roses unless you want to be mocked by everyone for the next 48 months. So I handed a few roses to three girls on the street. Very quickly a big guy came up to me and asked if I was hitting on his girlfriend, using a lot of swear words like the Delay No More fashion brand. I explained very calmly that I had been given a huge bouquet of flowers by a random girl and was just handing them out because I couldn't be seen with flowers at basketball practice. He did not believe me. I sarcastically gave him a rose. It escalated from there.

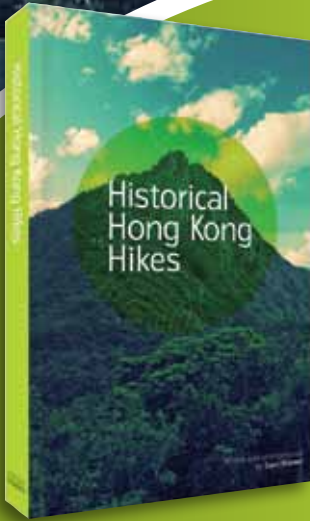
Cambridge—2005

I was waiting in my dorm room for my girlfriend at the time; I had bought some flowers and prepared some nice things. She showed up 20 minutes late holding a rose, presumably given to her by 2003 me, who had traveled through time like that terrible movie with Eric Bana. I asked her what was up and it turned out this nice guy had sought her out of a crowd of dozens walking to class and given her this rose. On it was a note.

Pretending to be a super secure guy I brushed it off and encouraged her to open the note so we could laugh at this loser's platitudes. She opened it and it was a flier for Echo, our school's eating disorder group. So instead of exchanging awesome Valentine's gifts, I spend the next few hours consoling her by telling her that she's "not too thin" and "definitely fat enough that she didn't have an eating disorder."

Yalun Tu is a columnist for HK Magazine. You can reach him at yalun.tu@gmail.com, yaluntu.posterous.com, or @yaluntu on Twitter.

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Blue Valentine ★★★★★

(USA) Directed by Derek Cianfrance. Starring Ryan Gosling, Michelle Williams. Category III. 114 minutes. Opening.

Every relationship has its ups and downs. For the young couple in “Blue Valentine”—as the title points out—it’s mostly the latter. In writer-director Derek Cianfrance’s poignant drama set in Pennsylvania, Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams play a blue-collar worker and a nurse whose disintegrating six-year-long marriage is stripped down to its very beginning and very end, and observed through close-ups and in depth. Intensely and yet subtly acted by two of the broodiest and (dare I say) finest young actors of our time, this naturalistic piece (astoundingly reminiscent of John Cassavetes’ cinema-vérité groundbreaker, “Faces”), with a sophisticated narrative juxtaposing past and present, is a thought-provoking indie gem of emotional truth.

Waking up one morning in their rural Pennsylvania house, Dean (Gosling), Cindy (Williams) and their five-year-old daughter Frankie discover their dog is missing. A depressive domestic atmosphere that pervades breakfast indicates the couple is not in a happy place. The husband is loving and light-hearted, while the overworked wife is disillusioned and sullen, obviously suffocated by marital life. Trying to rekindle the long-forgotten spark in their relationship, Dean decides to take Cindy to a cheap “romantic hotel” for a one-night stay. She’s extremely reluctant, but agrees to go. And the room they get is ironically named “Future Room,” cheesily and funnily decorated with a sci-fi theme and a rotating bed.

But things weren’t always like this. Cianfrance’s screenplay—co-written with Joey Curtis and Cami Delavigne over the course of 12 years—flashes back to when Cindy and Dean first meet at a nursing home. Cindy’s dysfunctional family has shaped her reserve, but she finds it hard to resist this handsome, warm and goofily charming man. He serenades her on the street—Gosling strums the ukulele and sings “You Always Hurt the One You Love” while Williams dances—in a beautiful scene that’s almost unbearably heartbreaking to watch because we know that these two people, once so ecstatically in love, eventually end up hurting each other, something they never wanted but don’t know how to stop.

The back-and-forth cuts between the two tenses, purposely neglecting the middle chunk of this relationship, suggest that their love is fated for doom. We learn that Frankie is an accident. Cindy has ambitions to be a doctor instead of a nurse, and is dissatisfied that Dean is wasting his potential just to be a devoted husband and father. Back in the hotel room, they drink and have sex. But unlike the erotic love-making that characterized their early days, these scenes are loaded with such hostility and agony that they’re the saddest to witness. Other interactions are equally destructive; every conversation ends with an argument, and it finally leads to a major blow-up.

Cianfrance requested that the two leads live together for a month in the characters’ on-set house before the shooting, and the payoff is huge. Gosling and Williams each deliver a nuanced portrayal of individuals that audiences can easily relate to; but together, they create a compelling and believable joint performance that simply goes above and beyond. Though the emotions become overwhelming at times, Cianfrance’s direction is rather constrained and focused as the on-screen relationship melts down. With stunningly textured cinematography, “Blue Valentine” is a rational narrative about an irrational relationship that hits a dead end. We love and hate the two suffering characters, wondering if they can find salvation; and most importantly, we reflect on our own relationships as we’re taken along this wrenching journey. Tough, but worthwhile. **Penny Zhou**

Opening Soon

True Grit
(USA) John Wayne’s 1969 western is remade by the Coen brothers. After the murder of her father by Tom Chaney (Josh Brolin), 14-year-old Texan farm girl Mattie Ross (Hailee Steinfeld) hires U.S. Marshal Rooster Cogburn (Jeff Bridges) to capture the killer. They are joined by Texas Ranger LaBoeuf (Matt Damon), who’s after Chaney for a different reason. Opens Feb 24.

Black Swan
(USA) See review on page 36. Opens Feb 24.

Opening

Blue Valentine
(USA) See review, above. Opened Feb 17.

(USA) Christina Aguilera is a small town girl with a big ol' voice who comes to LA to pursue her dreams. Cher (yes, that Cher) plays a burlesque lounge's former headliner who doesn't wear much other than her corsets. Expect lots of song and dance and feather boas. Directed by Steve Antin. Also starring Stanley Tucci, Alan Cumming, Kristen Bell. Opened Feb 17.

(USA) Long-time friends Emma (Natalie Portman) and Adam (Ashton Kutcher) embark upon a no-strings-attached physical relationship and intend to keep it that way to protect their friendship. But it doesn't take long for them to realize it's not as easy as they thought. Directed by Ivan Reitman. Opened Feb 17.

(USA) "1408" director Mikael Håfström helms a new supernatural thriller starring Anthony Hopkins as an unorthodox priest, Father Lucas Trevant, who teaches at an exorcism school in the Vatican. When reluctant student Michael Kovak (Colin O'Donoghue), who holds doubts about the controversial practice, is sent to be mentored by Trevant, he is forced to question everything he believes. **Opened Feb 17.**

(USA) An action-thriller about a group of underwater cave divers who venture into the most beautiful but least accessible cave system in the world. When they get trapped deep within the complicated caverns by a sudden tropical storm, they have to risk their lives in order to get back into the open sea. Directed by Alister Grierson. Starring Rhys Wakefield, Allison Cratchley, Christopher Baker. Opened Feb 17.

(China) In this romantic comedy, Andy Lau plays a hot-shot advertising executive who has been having a tough time since a new female exec, Lee (Gong Li), took his promotion and became his boss. But after an accident, he is granted the ability to read women's minds, and naturally, he decides to use this new gift for revenge. Sound familiar? Yep, Mel Gibson did the exact same thing back in 2000 in a film with the same name. Directed by Chen Daming. Opened Feb 17.

(UK/USA) British director Danny Boyle ("Trainspotting," "Slumdog Millionaire") retells the shocking true story of mountain climber Aron Ralston. When canyoneering alone in Utah in 2003, Ralston was trapped by a boulder but miraculously escaped after 127 hours by eventually amputating his arm. James Franco's portrait of Ralston has become an Oscar favorite this year. Also starring Kate Mara, Cl  mence Po  sy. ★★★★★
BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

(Hong Kong) In the sixth entry of the romantic comedy series, Cecilia Cheung, Louis Koo and Chapman To play three characters trapped in a humorous love triangle, while Donnie Yen takes up the role of a cosmetics sales clerk who is romantically linked to a model played by Carina Lau. Directed by Hing Ka-chan, Janet Chun. ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

(France) When lovers Gaspard and Marion take a vacation in Southern France, they stumble across a lost cell phone. But when they track down the owner, they find him dead, lying beside a half-conscious girl named Audrey (Louise Bourgoin), who later leads Gaspard into an obscure universe through a video game. Does the plot not make sense to you either? Directed by Gilles Marchand. ★★ BC.

(USA) Yes, geeks, they really picked Seth Rogan to play the masked hero and comic icon, now get over it! In director Michel Gondry's ("Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind") film adaptation, playboy Britt Reid (Rogan) just becomes the heir to his recently deceased father's media empire. He and his father's assistant Kato (Jay Chou) team up as a vigilante duo that pose as criminals in order to get close to them. With the aid of Britt's new secretary (Cameron Diaz), the unlikely crime-fighters set out to bring down the leader of LA's underworld (Christoph Waltz). ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

(USA) In Clint Eastwood's latest directorial effort, Matt Damon plays former psychic George Lonegan, who is sought out by three separate people who come face to face with death. The characters intersect as they seek help from the reluctant George. Screenplay by Peter Morgan ("Frost/Nixon," "The Queen"). ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

(Hong Kong) A feel-good local film that tells the story of Shun (Tony Leung Ka-fai), who, together with his wife (Sandra Ng) and three kids (Aarif Lee, Mag Lam and Clorinda Chan), returns home to stay with his father (Stanley Fung) after a failed business venture. But things take a turn when his old buddy Lung (Eric Tsang) shows up. Directed by Eric Tsang, Chung Shu-kai. ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

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Black Swan ★★★★★

(USA) Directed by Darren Aronofsky. Starring Natalie Portman, Mila Kunis, Vincent Cassel, Barbara Hershey, Winona Ryder. Category IIB. 108 minutes. Opening soon.

Trading in an aging fighter's vexing struggles both inside and outside the ring for a young ballerina's all-consuming and deranging quest for artistic perfection, Darren Aronofsky's psychosexual thriller, "Black Swan," is the sinister female cousin of his humanistic, masculine last effort, "The Wrestler." With Natalie Portman giving a career-defining performance as a high-strung dancer in an operatic breakdown, this Polanski-esque masterpiece—an all-round display of Aronofsky's extraordinary techniques—is a grotesque and magnificent delirium that will leave you deeply disturbed and fascinated.

Working at a New York City ballet company, Nina (Portman) is a sweet and fragile ingénue whose single-dimensional life is completely devoted to ballet. She lives with her retired-ballerina mother (Barbara Hershey), a smothering and infantilizing control freak, and sleeps in a pink-and-white bedroom filled with stuffed animals. Determined to land the lead role of Swan Queen in the company's upcoming rendition of "Swan Lake," she practices day and night despite split toenails and mysterious scratches on her back. It's clear to the company's French director Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) that Nina perfectly taps into the purity and innocence of the Swan Queen. He gives her the part but there's one thing: the lead also has to master the other half of this dual role—the Queen's seductive evil twin, Black Swan.

Limited but significant scenes with former-prima ballerina Beth (Winona Ryder) show us the brutal reality of this business. And Nina knows it well. So when Leroy keeps pushing her boundaries psychologically and sexually to free her from her rigid version of Black Swan, she tries hard to follow his guidance. But her real threat comes from the company's newest addition, Lily (Mila Kunis), an outgoing, flirtatious charmer who creates an "imprecise but effortless" Black Swan. As Lily's cast as Nina's understudy, their frenemy relationship propels Nina into a self-destructive exploration and realization of the dark, sexual side of herself, while her ambition and insecurity soon lead to horrifying Freudian delusions of disfiguration and doppelgangers. But the show must go on.

Due to several funding collapses, it took the writer-director of "Pi" and "Requiem of a Dream" 10 years to finally realize this film. An over-the-top sensual and hysterical thesis on the intriguing topic of female duality and sexuality set in the world of high art, "Black Swan" easily draws comparisons to such classics as "Rosemary's Baby," "All About Eve" and "The Red Shoes," but remains remarkably unique and original. Aronofsky brilliantly creates a gruesome and ominous atmosphere largely through dramatic, symphonic scores (mainly based on Tchaikovsky's originals), a highly-stylized cinematography (hand-held camera, long takes and facial close-ups) and the frequent usage of mirrors, which crucially enhance the film's symbolic style. Meanwhile, from Hershey's creepy mother who sounds more manipulative than loving when calling Nina "my sweet girl," to Cassel's demanding director embodied with astonishing physicality and personality, the stellar cast's on-the-money portraits of an array of contradictory characters send the film into masterpiece territory.

In addition to her childhood ballet background, Portman went through almost a year of professional training with Kunis and does most of her own dancing in the film. And let's just say that nothing she's done before in her 16-year-long career will prepare you for her performance here—with or without the tutus. And after watching "Black Swan," you'll never look at ballet the same way again. Penny Zhou

Let the Bullets Fly

(China) Actor-turned-director Jiang Wen writes, directs and stars in his latest black comedy, set in China during the chaotic 1920s. On his way to a small town to take up a post as its new mayor, Tang (Ge You) is robbed by notorious bandit Zhang (Jiang Wen), who also hijacks Tang's mayoral position. But upon their arrival in town, Zhang meets his match in ruthless local gentry Huang (Chow Yun-fat), and Tang finds himself in the middle of a gang battle. Also starring Carina Lau, Hu Jun, Chen Kun. ★★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

Little Fockers

(USA) Why anyone would think a third installment to the "Fockers" series would be a good idea is beyond us. But alas, the wacky family, played by an all-star cast, is back again with Greg (Ben Stiller) persistent in his quest to prove to his father-in-law, Jack (Robert De Niro) that he is prepared to take on the role of the "Gregfocker"—the title of the family patriarch. The usual spy games, mistaken extramarital circumstances and cheap laughs ensue. Directed by Paul Weitz. Also starring Owen Wilson, Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, Laura Dern. ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

Mr. & Mrs. Incredible (Hong Kong) In this Hong Kong rip-off of "The Incredibles," Louis Koo and Sandra Ng play a married superhero couple who have retired and moved to a small village to live a happy, simple life. But five years later, the duo has to don their costumes one more time in the name of justice as they unexpectedly get entangled in a murder conspiracy. Directed by Vincent Kok. ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

Shaolin (China/Hong Kong) Jackie Chan, Andy Law and Nicolas Tse star in this new version of "The Shaolin Temple" (Jet Li's 1982 movie debut). Arrogant general Hao Jie is betrayed by his second-in-command and seeks refuge in a Shaolin temple, where he looks upon the temple's masters with contempt. But after his family is wiped out by a warlord, he befriends a Shaolin cook and joins the masters in a battle against evil warlords. Directed by Benny Chan. ★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

HK PICKS



Tangled (3D) (USA) The kingdom's most wanted bandit, Flynn Rider (voiced by Zachary Levi), stumbles across a mysterious tower while on the run, and is unexpectedly taken hostage by Rapunzel (Mandy Moore), a feisty teen with 70 feet of golden hair who has been locked away in the tower for eighteen years by the evil Mother Gothel (Donna Murphy). Looking for a way to escape, she strikes a deal with Flynn and the duo set out on a hilarious and hair-raising escapade. Directed by Nathan Greno, Byron Howard. ★★★★★ BC, AMC, UA, GH, MCL.

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Another Year (UK) In British auteur Mike Leigh's ("Vera Drake," "Happy-Go-Lucky") new Oscar-nominated comedy drama, Jim Broadbent and Lesley Manville play a happily married couple in their autumn years, who suddenly find out that their friends, colleagues and family are all living a somewhat unhappy life. Sat, Feb 26, 5:30pm, BC.

Mahler on the Couch (Austria) Based on true events, this biographical drama tells the story of the great Austrian composer seeking help from Sigmund Freud about his collapsing marriage after he finds out his musician wife is cheating on him with young architect, Walter Gropius. Fri, Feb 25, 7:40pm, BC; Sun, Feb 27, 1:30pm, IFC.

Rome in Rome (Spain) "Sex and Lucia" director Julio Medem makes another sexy drama about a physical and yet brief encounter between two females in Rome, one a Spanish woman and a mother of two, the other a Russian woman who's due to marry in a week. They go separate ways after a one night stand, but find their lives profoundly changed. Wed, Mar 9, 7:45pm and 9:50pm, IFC.

The Met: Live in HD 2010-11 Season
The New York Metropolitan Opera's award-winning series returns to Hong Kong for a dazzling second season, featuring more high-definition screenings the world's greatest operas. Wellcome Theatre, HKAPA Bethanie Landmark Heritage Campus, 139 Pokfulam Rd., Pok Fu Lam. \$170 each from www.hkticketing.com, 3128-8288. Visit www.themetinhongkong info for program details.

HK PICKS



La Fanciulla del West
Premiered in 1910 at the Met, Puccini's three-act Wild West opera, based on American author David Belasco's play, is set in California during the Gold Rush. On the occasion of its centennial, American diva Deborah Voigt sings the title role, starring opposite Marcello Giordani. Nicola Luisotti conducts. Sat, Mar 5, 7pm; Sun, Mar 6, 1pm and 7pm.

Iphigénie en Tauride
American mezzo-soprano Susan Graham and the great Plácido Domingo reprise their starring roles in Gluck's interpretation of ancient Greek dramatist Euripides' play on Greek mythologies. Patrick Summers conducts. Sat, Apr 16, 7pm; Sun, Apr 17, 1pm and 7pm.

Lucia di Lammermoor
Famous for its lyric coloratura heroine role, Donizetti's tragic opera masterpiece was brought back in a hit production by Mary Zimmerman, headlined by French coloratura soprano Natalie Dessay, opposite Joseph Calleja, who sings her lover Edgardo. Sat, May 14, 6:30pm; Sun, May 15, 1pm and 6:30pm.

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First Person

Hailing from Sichuan, **James Hong** fought the odds to climb Hong Kong's social ladder. Today he is the general manager of the marketing division of Sony Computer Entertainment, which means he's the brains behind Sony's eye-catching publicity strategies. The part-time cosplayer is often credited for creating the "pseudo-model" phenomenon. He talks to Grace Tsoi about being an immigrant, gamer and diehard traveler.



I thought it was a city full of golden opportunities.

I was born in Sichuan in the 1970s. My grandma raised me.

When I was in junior high, my parents divorced. Divorce was a very rare thing in the mainland at that time.

Every classmate laughed at me. They found out that my parents were separating because the court sent a divorce certificate to my school. There was no privacy.

After 1979, the central government started issuing one-way permits for people to migrate to Hong Kong. I was in the first generation of new immigrants.

I dreamed of living in Hong Kong because I thought that it was a city full of golden opportunities.

In 1980, Hong Kong dramas started airing on mainland TV channels. We could only watch propaganda plays before, and we absolutely loved Hong Kong dramas because they were a lot more interesting and not as preachy.

Even in Sichuan, everyone learned Cantonese and sang Cantopop songs. Everyone knew Lisa Wang, for example—she was just like the Lady Gaga of that time.

Nobody really wants to learn Cantonese or listens to Cantopop songs now.

New immigrants were treated very badly. Even the Filipino maids got better treatment than us. Mainlanders were considered uncool and dirty.

I am a person who can adapt to different environments. I believe I could still survive if I were in the Amazon jungle or the Sahara desert.

Even though I grew up on the mainland, I am not an "angry youth."

I worked hard and got into the University of Hong Kong. The first company I worked for was Fuji Film.

A professor said that film was a dying business and urged me to find another job. I decided to join the gaming business when Sony Computer Entertainment was just four months old.

At the gaming conventions, I don't want to be merely a visitor. I want to be part of the shows. There's no better way to do that than to dress up as a figure from Final Fantasy.

The thickest part of the newspaper is Section C, which is entertainment news. It is a major battlefield for coverage. We were scratching our heads, thinking of a way to create media buzz.

We picked out some "game girls" and carefully planned to make them famous. We shot shows and planned a lot of events for them [to promote Sony products]. Later, it created the whole phenomenon of "pseudo-models."

We offended some people in society. They think that we made entertainment news too sexy and juicy.

In 2007, a mother [who was unemployed] jumped to her death with her son, and the media painted Tin Shui Wai as a place of sadness. I was a new immigrant myself, so I understood things would be a lot better if people had jobs.

A few months after the incident, I organized a recruitment day in Tin Shui Wai. I offered jobs to the unskilled workers there, and I also gave them higher salaries.

As a small potato, I was able to change people's perceptions of Tin Shui Wai and improve the community. It felt better than selling 10,000 games.

Despite a busy work schedule, I travel 10 times a year. I am always recharged by a journey.

My favorite travel destination is South America because the people are very passionate.

I have set foot in more than 70 countries, and I feel rather pleased about that.

I have seriously considered resigning from my current job and becoming a full-time traveler.

If you asked me whether I want to die at my office or while on a trip, of course I would prefer to be traveling—even if it's during the last minute of my life.

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